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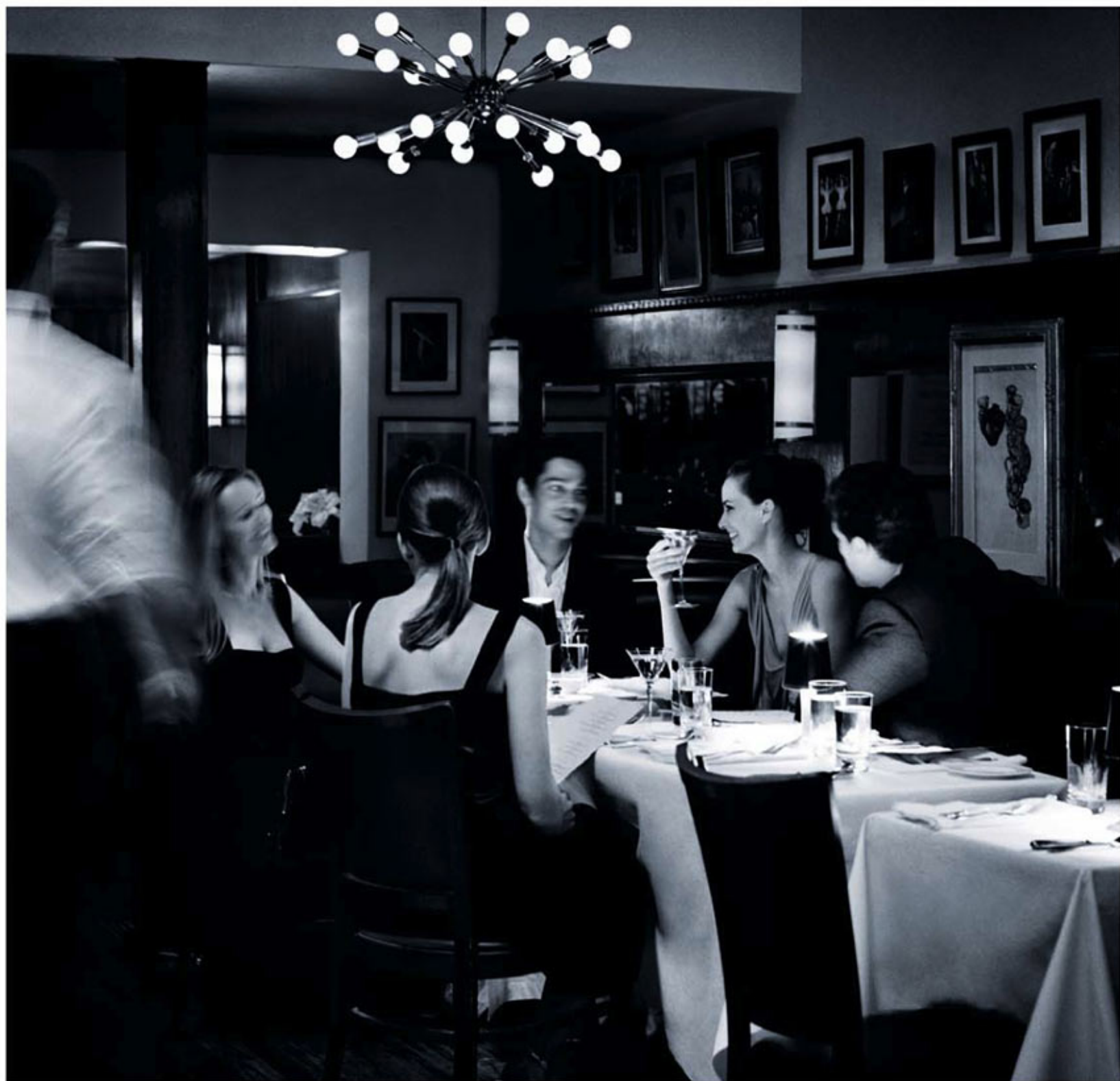


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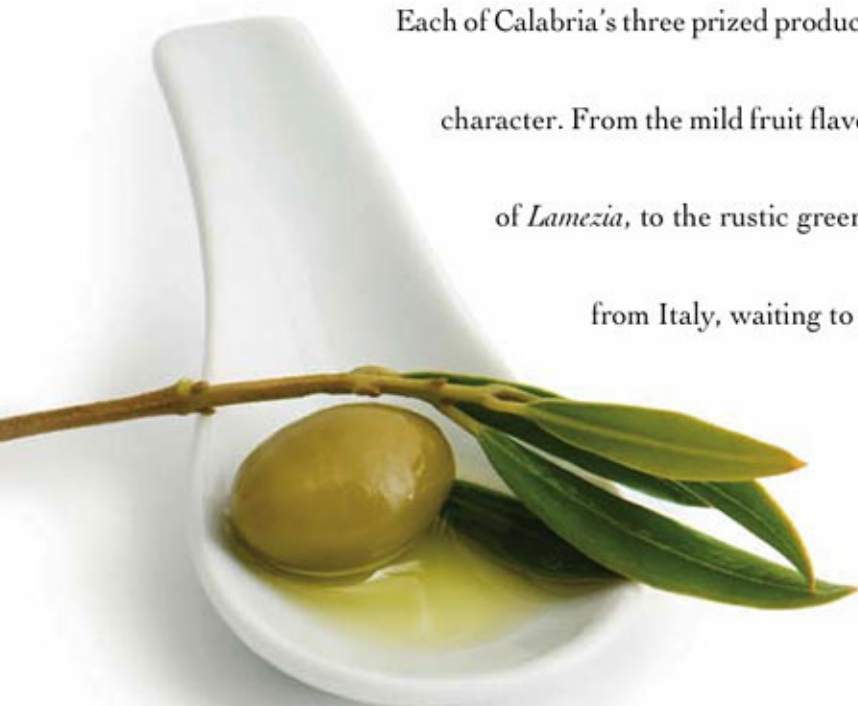
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COVER

Focaccia with tomatoes and olives from Basilicata, Italy.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI

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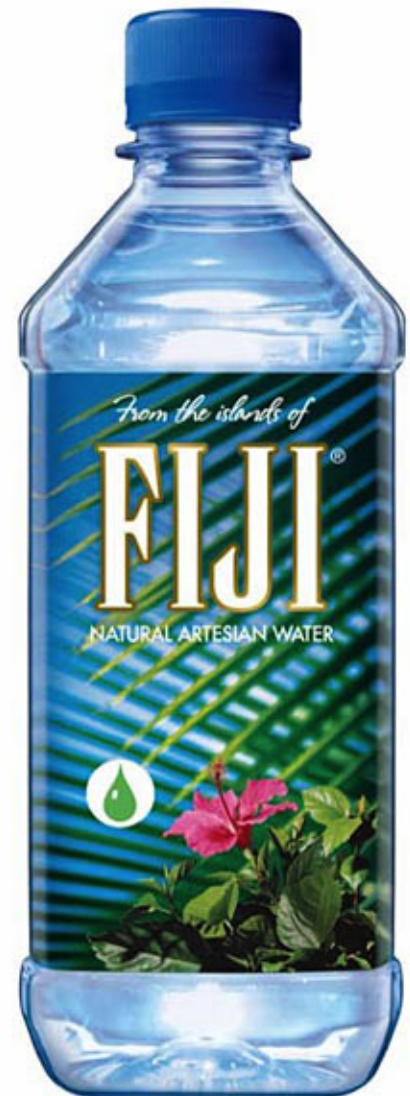
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This Month at SAVEUR.COM

This month at SAVEUR.COM you'll find everything you need to know about Turkish coffee; a roundup of our favorite spring salads; recipes for homemade ice cream and more tempting milk shakes, including a black and white and a caramel malted; advice and tasting notes on the spirits of Basilicata; a gallery of Istanbul street food; and many other exclusive online features.

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FIRST

The Sweetest Fruit

A shopping trip; a tasty revelation

WHEN SAVEUR contributing editor Andrea Nguyen recently invited me on a shopping trip for the recipes in her feature story about Saigon (see "Coming Home", page 82), I jumped at the chance. Our destination was the Vietnamese-American enclave of Westminster, California, which lies about an hour south of Los Angeles. I hadn't been to Little Saigon, as the area is called, in over 15 years, and I was thrilled at the prospect of experiencing it with Andrea, who grew up nearby and returns regularly from her home in Northern California.

The first thing I noticed upon my return was that Little Saigon wasn't exactly little anymore. What had once been a self-contained stretch of unremarkable-looking strip malls now extended for mile after mile of gleaming supermarkets and shops. After pulling in to the parking lot of our destination, the Westminster Superstore, we grabbed a cart and entered. Within minutes, I lost Andrea, having frozen in my footsteps before an eye-popping selection of bottled fish sauces. There were doz-

ens of kinds of that pungent Southeast Asian staple—not just the refined and unrefined versions that I was familiar with but categories and regional versions I'd never heard of. Were they used in different dishes? I wondered. How did they taste? When I caught up with Andrea, she was standing in front of a similarly staggering array of coconut milks from around the world. I'd never seen so many choices—not in Asia, not anywhere.

When it comes right down to it, we're for-

agers, all of us, and nothing plays into that primal instinct quite like food shopping. Whether we're hunting for Vietnamese ingredients, heirloom produce, or just something new and delicious, it's in our most basic nature to seek variety. The epiphany I had that day at the Westminster Superstore, though, was not how much better food shopping had become over the past few decades but how food shopping encourages culinary curiosity. My fellow shoppers were hardly homogeneous: among



Andrea Nguyen with fresh durians at the Westminster Superstore.

the Vietnamese-American families trolling the aisles were folks speaking Spanish, Hindi, and Russian. They were buying Vietnamese herbs, ogling glistening fish, pawing through piles of Asian noodles. I, meanwhile, was loading up on fresh durians, the famously weird-smelling fruit I'd been able to find only "fresh-frozen" in the States. Just then, a trio of *real* Orange County housewives—as compared with the glammed-up ones on the popular television show—pulled their carts next to mine. One of them asked how to eat durian. "You pop it open and devour it," I replied.

And that's exactly what Andrea and I did when we got back to the car. I hacked a fruit open with a pocketknife, and we binged, sinking our teeth into its custard-like flesh. The intense perfume and multilayered flavors—much more nuanced than merely sweet, with all the complexity of a good wine's—were intoxicating. And for that moment we marveled at what a delicious place America is. —JAMES OSELAND, Editor-in-Chief

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FARE

Memories and Marvels from the World of Food, plus Agenda and More

Great Shakes

IT HAD BEEN TOO LONG since I'd had a good milk shake. When I was growing up in New England, I lived for those thick, creamy treats: the orange frosted from the local Friendly's, sipped through two straws after a high-school dance; the root beer-spiked brown cows at the diner on Main Street; the frothy pink shakes my mother and I would whip up after a day of strawberry picking. But, like so many things that slip away with the passing of youth, my milk shake obsession gradually waned as I turned to more-mature refreshments. Then I came across a new book by a Boston-based writer and milk shake connoisseur named Adam Ried; it's called *Thoroughly Modern Milkshakes* (Norton, 2009), and it has caused my love of milk shakes to blossom anew.

Ried's book approaches the milk shake with an ardor usually reserved for more-highfalutin culinary subjects: there are sections devoted to the finer points of shake making (like adding jam to a fruit shake to boost flavor), equipment

FARE

(he tested a dozen electric blenders), and farm-fresh ingredients ("Not many people think of milkshakes when they see a bin of cucumbers," Ried writes, "but maybe they should"). I delighted in finding recipes for old classics, like the chocolate and vanilla layered shake known as a black-and-white (pictured below), as well as decidedly more-grown-up combinations, like coffee shakes spiked with star anise and cinnamon. There are also descriptions of milk shake traditions around the world, like the creamy avocado version popular across Asia. Thumbing through the milk shake history and lore made me realize that, having read all about burgers, barbecue, and other iconic American foods, I still had plenty to learn about the good old shake.

Like carbonated soda, that other fountain shop staple, the

STRAWBERRY MILK SHAKE

SERVES 2

This recipe is based on one in *Thoroughly Modern Milkshakes* (Norton, 2009) by Adam Ried.

- ½ cup cold milk
- 2 tbsp. strawberry jam
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 4 scoops strawberry ice cream
- 4 scoops strawberry sorbet

Put milk, jam, and lemon juice into a blender and blend for 10 seconds. Add ice cream and sorbet and blend, pausing once or twice to mash the mixture with a rubber spatula, until mixture is smooth and creamy, about 45 seconds. Serve in chilled glasses.



In the 1930s, even the smallest towns were home to bustling soda fountains.

milk shake, in its early forms, was once more a tonic than a treat, Ried explains. During the Victorian era, restorative milk drinks—such as koumyss, a Mongolian fermented milk beverage—were all the rage at fashionable spas in England and America, and eventually drugstores started serving “healthful” blends of milk, shaved ice, and, often, whiskey. Indeed, in an old

primer for druggists published in 1897 called *The Standard Manual of Soda and Other Beverages*, given to me by a friend who knew of my love of shakes, I found recipes for milk shakes fortified with everything from eggs to Angostura bitters. Eventually, alcohol fell out of favor, and the Prohibition-fueled demand for soft drinks inspired a burst of inventiveness among soda

jerks: pharmacies jockeyed to coin signature drinks and to install the latest gadgets, most notably the Hamilton Beach Drinkmaster, an appliance equipped with a blending stick and removable cup that made it easy for operators to mix shakes to their desired thickness. (Ray Kroc, the father of the McDonald’s restaurant franchise, got his start as a salesman of milk shake machines.) As Ried points out, the aeration caused by mechanical mixing gave shakes a creamier texture, and by the 1920s, many shops were gilding the lily by replacing shaved ice with another popular treat: ice cream.

I was fascinated to learn from Ried’s book that two of the most important developments in the history of the shake both took place in the town of Racine, Wisconsin. There, in 1883, William Horlick patented malted milk powder, the ingredient that distinguishes the especially rich and flavorful subset of shakes called malteds (for more on malteds, see page 96). It was also in Racine, in 1922, that a Polish immigrant named Stephen Poplawski introduced the electric home blender, which allowed virtually anyone to whip up thick shakes with ease.

Rooting around in my parents’ basement recently, I found the old blender that served our family so steadfastly throughout my childhood summers. I dusted it off and treated myself to Ried’s sublime strawberry shake. One sip, and it all came back: sunshine, Mom, and the sweet sting of an ice cream headache. —Sarah Karnasiewicz

Sweet by Any Name Like any great culinary invention, the American milk shake comes in numerous guises. » What the rest of the world knows as a milk shake Rhode Islanders call a **cabinet**, after the cupboards in soda fountains where blenders and syrups were traditionally stored; coffee cabinets (made with the state’s signature coffee syrup) are the preference among locals. » The St. Louis specialty known as a **concrete** is an ultrathick take on the shake that combines dense frozen custard with crushed candy, cookies, nuts, or fruit. » In Boston and parts of New England, a shake is sometimes called a **frappe** (pronounced FRAP); the name

derives from the French word *frappé*, meaning whipped. » The **smoothie** (a term that first appeared in a series of 1940s cookbooks that accompanied Waring blenders) is a healthful twist on the shake, made from fruit and milk or frozen yogurt, that became wildly popular in California in the 1960s. » **Batidos**, shakes made with fresh fruit (such as pineapple and passion fruit), ice, and milk, hail from the Caribbean and Central America and are increasingly common in the United States. —Katherine Cancila





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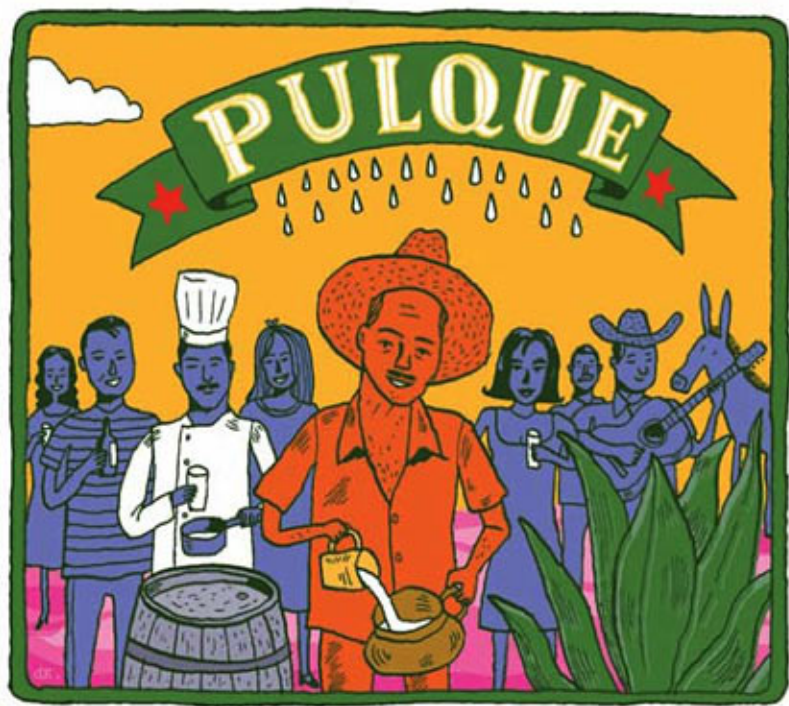
Ancient Thirst

LAST SPRING, I was strolling across Mexico City's plaza Garibaldi, dodging strumming mariachis and tourists, when I came upon La Hermosa Hortensia, a cantina specializing in pulque, an ancient drink crafted from fermented agave nectar. I'd encountered pulque before in my travels but always passed it up in favor of more-familiar potables, like smoky mezcal and tart tequila (both of which are also produced from agave but are distilled after fermenting). This time, though, I strode to the counter and gave pulque a try. Thick and milky, with a bracing, earthy bite, it left me light-headed but strangely revived.

According to Aztec myth, pulque flowed forth from the breasts of Mayahuel, the goddess of agave. More likely, pre-Columbian peoples started using the drink as a ritual sacrament after discovering the wonders of spontaneous fermentation, a process by which yeasts and bacteria in the air convert liquid sugar to alcohol. What's certain is that the highly perishable, nutrient-rich beverage, which is roughly as potent as an ale and is still made

by hand on sprawling agave plantations, has been a favorite tippie of Mexicans for a long time—especially among farmers and workers in the country's villages and cities. Over time, however, beer and soft drinks have replaced pulque as the people's beverages of choice; today, fewer than 20 *pulquerias* (pulque bars) remain in Mexico City, where once there were hundreds.

Mexico's thirsts are changing again, though. These days, you'll find more spiky-haired students than factory workers at La Hermosa Hortensia. And Ricardo Pandal, the owner of a nightclub in the historic city center, told me that he has had pulque curado (pulque that's "cured" or flavored with chile, sweetened fruit juices, or even pureed nuts) on his menu for three years and is ordering more every week. Though skeptics question whether the trend can revive pulque's struggling, artisanal industry, others believe that the drink is so entrenched in Mexican culture that it's guaranteed to survive. "Pulque is the drink of the gods," Pandal told me unequivocally. "It will never disappear." —Nils Bernstein



AGENDA

MAY

1-4

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For one weekend in this picturesque corner of Connemara, the food trumps the view. In the towns of Tullycross, Tully, and Renvyle, you can savor mussels from the bountiful beds of Killary Harbor. The mollusks are local, but the dishes come from around the globe: from smoked mussels to ones cooked Indonesian style in coconut milk. Information: www.goconnemara.com.



MAY

1-10

SPIRIT OF SPEYSIDE WHISKY FESTIVAL

Speyside, Scotland

For its tenth anniversary, this celebration of Scotland's national drink in Speyside, home to more than half of Scotland's malt whisky distilleries, will expand to ten days to include master classes, distillery tours, and tastings that pair local whiskies with everything from chocolate to haggis. Information: www.spiritofspeyside.com.



MAY

18

SAGRA DEGLI ASPARAGI

Santena, Italy

This seasonal festival celebrates one of Santena's most prized local crops: asparagus. A brigade of cooks prepares dozens of dishes featuring the Tuscan variety of the spring vegetable—which owes its intense color and bright flavor to the area's sandy soils—for a sprawling midday meal taken outside in the town's picturesque main piazza. Information: 212/245-5618.

MAY

24

FESTA DE LA FOCACCIA

Recco, Italy

Like many of Italy's food fêtes, the focaccia festival held in this Ligurian town is hyperlocal, like a block party in honor of the town's most famous bread. Vendors offer focaccias both thick and thin, some topped with cheese, vegetables, and herbs, others with nothing but olive oil and sea salt. All are delicious. Information: www.italiantourism.com

MAY

30-31

WEEKEND DER SPONTANE GISTING

Buggenhout, Belgium

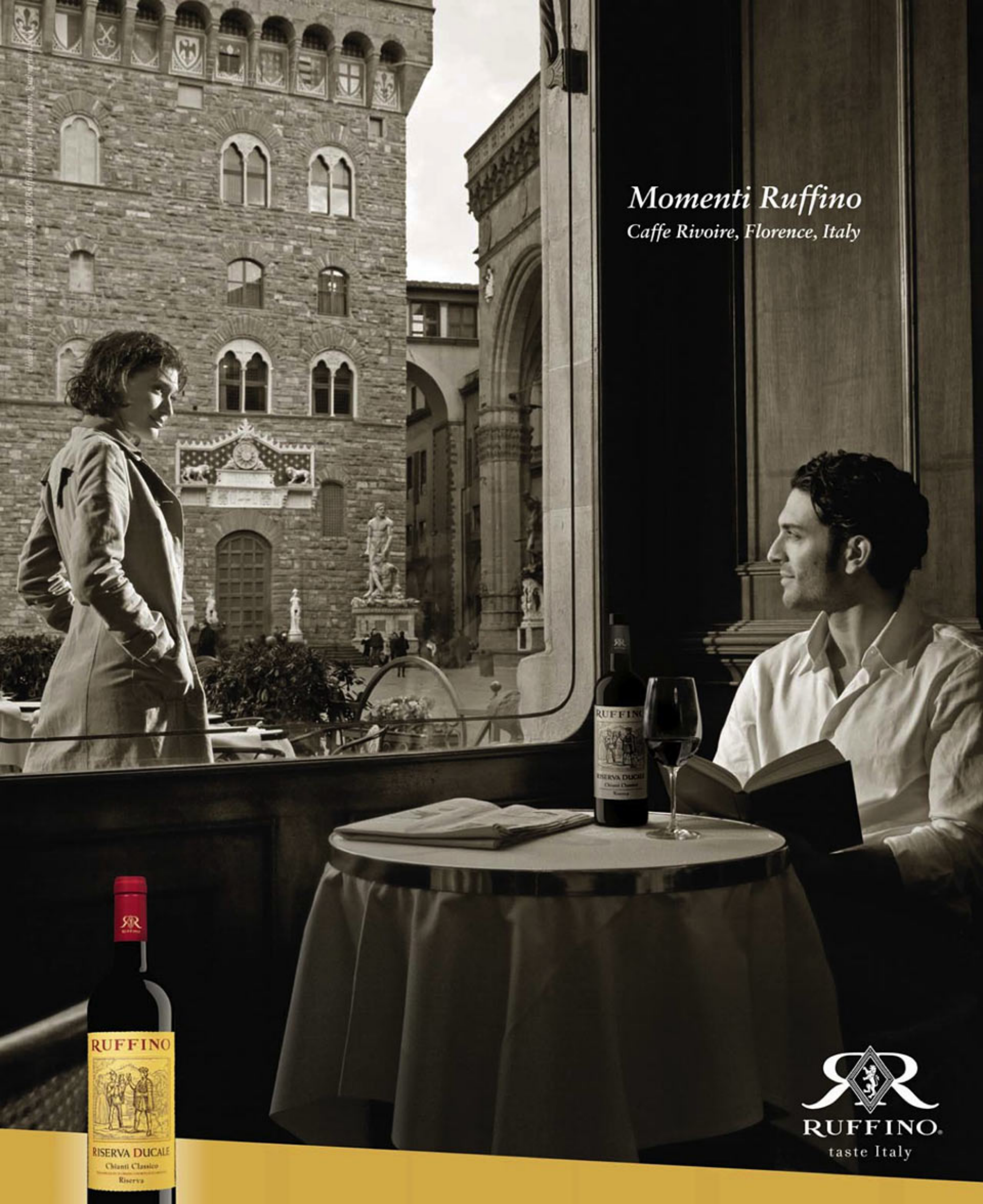
Lambic beers are brewed only in the Pajottenland region of Belgium, southwest of Brussels, where ambient yeasts in the air give the brews their tart, fruity character. This beerfest, put on by the Opstalse Bierpallieters, is a great chance to sample a range of varieties, including kriekenlambic, faro, and framboise. Information: www.bierpallieters.be.



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STATE PLATES: CONNECTICUT

Yankee Pride



THINK CONNECTICUT is one big suburb? Think again: its diverse immigrant communities, fertile farms, and vibrant university towns full of forward-thinking chefs add up to as rich a culinary landscape as that of many states three times its size. —Ben Conniff

LIFE AQUATIC

Whether hooked in the state's rivers or coastal bays, Connecticut's fish and shellfish draw crowds. Native delicacies include **quahogs**, the hardshell clams that star in New England clam chowder; plump **bluepoint oysters**; and **bluefish** (pictured below) from the Long Island Sound. In spring, Connecticut River valley residents welcome the season with **shad** bakes, at which the spawning fish is deboned, spread on oak planks, and roasted with salt pork over an open fire.



Apizza!

New Haven's Wooster Square has been synonymous with pizza (or as locals say, "apizza", pronounced ah-BEETS) since 1925, when an Italian immigrant, named Frank Pepe opened a pizzeria that turned out thin-crust pies topped with just tomato sauce, oregano, and anchovies, perfectly charred in a coal-fired oven. In time, Pepe's pies (shown above) became the gold standard in Connecticut (and, depending on whom you ask, the world); today, the signature version is topped with clams and chunks of garlic.



Green Pastures

Connecticut has been a hub of dairy production since the 18th century, when its lush pastures supported cows that supplied milk and cheese to New York City and Boston. In the 20th century, many of the state's family-run farms opened "dairy bars" serving homemade ice cream and diner fare; some, like the Prospect Dairy Bar, in Prospect, continue to draw loyal customers today. Between 1940 and 2009, the number of dairies in Connecticut dropped from 6,200 to 149; now many farmers are turning to a new product to keep their industry alive: farmstead cheese. Cato Corner Farm in Colchester and Beaver Brook Farm in Lyme are among the state's best cheese makers.

Connecticut's bounty is deliciously apparent on the menus of its most innovative restaurants. At the Dressing Room at the Westport Country Playhouse, the chef **Michel Nischan** (right) offers classic dishes crafted with local ingredients. Our favorite: the chicken pot pie with jerusalem artichoke sauce.



5 STATE SANDWICHES

1 A Connecticut-style **hot lobster roll** (shown right) is sublimely simple: lobster meat, lots of butter, and a split-top hot dog bun. Try the one served at Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale in Westbrook.

2 The **steamed cheeseburger** has a cult following in central Connecticut. Ted's Restaurant, in Meriden, prepares its burger in a custom-designed steaming cabinet and serves it bubbling over with cheddar.


3 Connecticut may have more hot dog stands per capita than any state in the union; Rawley's, in Fairfield, is beloved for its **deep-fried hot dogs** wrapped in bacon.



4 The Marcus Dairy Bar, in Danbury, serves the perfect old-school **open-face turkey sandwich**: thick slices of roasted meat and gravy on white bread with a generous helping of cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes.

5 For 87 years, the Nardelli family of Waterbury has stacked salami, cappicola ham, and provolone on fresh rolls with a homemade pickle, pepper, and onion marinade that has made the **Italian grinders** at its store famous.

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FARE

London's Bagel Beef

IN LONDON'S EAST END, beyond a boisterous strip of Bengali curry houses and nightclubs on a side street called Brick Lane, a spirited food battle is waged nightly. Just a slim coffee shop separates Brick Lane Beigel Bake from its longtime competitor, which calls itself Britain's First & Best Beigel Shop. In a city better known for fish and chips than for gefilte fish, the two bakeries stand as rival remnants of their neighborhood's once thriving Jewish community, serving up crisp, chewy bagels to loyal queues of bankers, party animals, cops, and cabbies for 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The bagels of Brick Lane are small, plain, and as old-fashioned as the Yiddish spelling in the stores' names; they have a dense interior and smooth, crunchy surface. Neither shop is

THE BAGELS OF BRICK LANE ARE TIME CAPSLE BAGELS: AS SMALL, PLAIN, AND OLD-FASHIONED AS THE YIDDISH SPELLING IN THE STORES' NAMES

kosher: Beigel Bake is open on Saturdays, and First & Best Beigel Shop offers such decidedly unkosher accompaniments as sausages, ham salad, and bacon. "We go through 300 boxes of bacon a week," says co-owner David Barzelai, whose Polish-born grandfather opened the shop in 1855. These days, Beigel Bake has an edge over First & Best: its salt beef bagel sandwich, a towering pile of thick-cut corned beef brisket with sharp English mustard and sliced gherkins; the specialty made Beigel Bake such a popular late-night destination that owner Sammy Minzly (shown at top right) often mans the night shift himself. And while Barzelai also makes a perfectly good salt beef sandwich, the lines



outside his shop are shorter even though he features a considerably larger menu, which includes sausage rolls, turkey, ham, tuna salad, and cake (shown above, with one of the shop's managers). I take this as proof that the best way to win a London bagel war is to stick to bagels and beef. —Jay Cheshes



One Good Bottle We've long been fans of the fresh white wines of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a region in northeastern Italy, especially the ones made with the tocai friulano grape. Among our favorites is the Bastianich 2005 Tocai Plus (\$69), a wine with a floral nose, heady flavors of peach and citrus, and a spicy complexity. Produced by Joe Bastianich, who along with his mother, Lidia, has forged, through restaurants, cookbooks, and television programs, a culinary empire based on introducing America to the delights of their ancestral home, the wine has an intensity that owes to the use of a method known as *appassimento*, in which grapes are hung to dry after harvest in order to boost their sugar content. Tocai lovers, take note, however: wines made with tocai friulano and bottled after 2007 will no longer bear that grape's name on the label and will instead be called just "friulano"—the result of a European Union ban intended to protect the Hungarian designation "tokaji", which denotes sweet white wines from Hungary's Tokaj region. —Jayanthi Daniel

60

Caribbean Islands*



4

Winemakers' Dinners



1

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CELLAR

Celtic Gold

After years in the shadow of their Scottish cousins, Irish whiskeys have come into their own

BY DAVID WONDRIK



THE IRISH MAY OR MAY NOT have invented whiskey (the jury's still out on that), but after a recent tasting of the best the island has to offer, I'm beginning to think they just might have perfected it. I haven't always had grounds to think so. Decades ago, when I first encountered Jameson, Bushmills, Paddy, and Tullamore Dew in the Irish joints that lined New York City's Third Avenue, those Irish standbys were the very definition of bar whiskeys: light, friendly blends that slid down the throat smiling and left little more in their wake than a mellow tingle and a lingering hint of grain. Compared with the intense, complex single-malt Scotches that were appearing on the market at the time, they were lightweights—pleasant ones, to be sure, but lightweights nonetheless.

It wasn't as if the Irish were keeping the more serious stuff to themselves, either. True, during the 19th century Irish distilleries exported

plenty of high-quality pure pot-still whiskey, a type unique to Ireland that is distilled in a single copper vessel from a combination of malted and unmalted barley. But by 1980—after the Irish Rebellion, the Depression, two world wars, the Troubles in the North, heavy emigration, and a shift in domestic tastes away from whiskey to beer—the 30 licensed distilleries that the island supported at the beginning of the century had dwindled to just two. In Northern Ireland there was Bushmills, which made, well, Bushmills, and in the Irish Republic there was Midleton, which made everything else. Neither showed much interest in bottling the kinds of rich, aged whiskeys that appeal to connoisseurs. They focused instead on lighter, younger blended whiskeys that were priced to compete with the Scotch blends (like Johnnie Walker Red Label, White Horse, and Dewar's) that had dominated the world market for Celtic whiskey for decades.

Now, there's nothing wrong with blended whiskeys. In fact, the reason the Scots turned to making them in the first place, back in the mid-19th century, was to have something more like the subtler-tasting spirits their cousins across the Irish Sea were selling. Traditional Scotch whisky (they spell it without the *e* in Scotland) was made from malted barley that was usually dried over peat smoke, fermented, distilled twice to a low proof in relatively small copper pot stills, and then matured in wood casks. The result was a fiery, smoky, thick, and even oily distillate with a rich underlying sweetness, thanks to the malt. Those who loved it loved it well, but it definitely wasn't for everybody, and the results could vary widely from one distillation to another. So, in order to create a more consistent product, Scotland's whisky merchants hit on the idea of mingling the strong-tasting malt whiskies of several distilleries. Then, for a lighter, smoother, and more approachable drink, they further blended that mix of malt whiskies with a high-proof, vodka-like "grain whisky" produced in a fractionating column still, an apparatus that creates a purer spirit than traditional pot stills do.

The Irish, on the other hand, had no need to monkey around with blending. Traditional, unblended Irish whiskey was already cheaper to make, smoother, and cleaner tasting than traditional Scottish malt whisky and yet had far more body and flavor than the insipid grain whisky. That circumstance owed to a handful of differences in the way the Irish did things: they used much larger, more economical pot stills; they used hot air rather than pungent peat smoke to dry their malt; and they usually mixed their malted barley with raw barley, oats, and rye, which added a pleasing undertone of bright, spicy graininess. On the strength of all this, most Irish distilleries were able to manage without the expediency of blending until the late 1930s, when hard times devastated the market for premium pure pot-still whiskeys. In the

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CELLAR

decades that followed, cheaper, tamer blends prevailed in Ireland.

BY THE 1980s, as the success of those Scottish single malts showed, the world market for whiskey was changing. People were drinking less of it, but when they were drinking it they wanted it to be special. At the end of the decade, Ireland woke up. In 1987, a group of investors opened a third distillery, at Cooley, north of Dublin, dedicated to making a full range of whiskeys. At around the same time, the other two big distilleries were bought by the French firm Pernod Ricard, which provided fresh capital and greater access to foreign markets. By the late '90s, sales of Irish whiskey were growing faster than those of any other kind. All three distilleries were starting to export premium whiskeys long-aged in oak that could compete with fine Scotches and at significantly lower prices.

Ten years on, things have only improved. For this article I rounded up 17 Irish whiskeys in a variety of styles, from pure pot-still whiskey made from a mix of malted and raw grain (the 12-year-old Redbreast) to rich pot-still blends (including the lovely Black Bush, a range of older Jamesons, and Midleton Very Rare, a vintage-dated blend of everything that's fine from that distillery). I also found single-malt whiskeys, both triple-distilled (from

Bushmills) and double-distilled (Cooley's Tyrconnell). There's even an ultralight aged grain whiskey and a double-distilled one made from peated malt (the Greenore and the Connemara, both also from Cooley). And now Ireland has a fourth distillery, Locke's, in the Midlands, SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE120 reopened on its 250th birthday in 2007, though its whiskeys aren't ready for market yet.

Taken together, these whiskeys are as refined a group of spirits as I've ever tasted. They're also remarkably consistent in character, with a sweet graininess in the nose, a sherry's muskiness on the tongue, and only a hint of sting in the tail to remind you that you're drinking liquor. While they'll stand up to an ice cube or two, if that's your preference, whiskeys this smooth require no ice or water to soften them. Indeed, if they have a fault, it's that they're a bit too obliging; in Ireland they call such things "moreish" (that is, they make you want more). I'd love to see one of Ireland's distillers resume the practice, last seen in the 1950s, of mixing barley with oats and rye in order to bring back that old-fashioned hint of spice and funk. Then again, to quibble with something at once so moreish and so consistently affordable as fine Irish whiskey seems more than a little ill spirited. 

Tasting Notes

Although there wasn't a single bad bottle among the 17 new-generation Irish whiskeys I tasted, a few stood out as especially refined, complex, or sumptuous in character. (See **THE PANTRY**, page 100, for sources.) —D.W.

Clontarf Classic Blend (\$20) This blended whiskey offers a gentle entry to the category at a more than gentle price. Meatier than the standard blends, it contains enough musky, raw-barley pot-still spirit to give it ample body.

Connemara Cask Strength Peated Single Malt (\$60) The folks at Cooley, better known for the intensely peaty Connemara 12-year-old single malt, have dialed things back with this whiskey, which lets the lushness of the barley come through. It's delicately smoky and balanced, particularly for a whiskey that's almost 60 percent alcohol.

Jameson 18 Year Old Limited Reserve (\$85) The Midleton distillery produces a lot of standard Jameson whiskey, all of it light and impeccably clean. Those qualities make this 18-year-old version a perfect example of the good things that long, careful aging can do. Notes of dill and toasted coconut in the nose; velvety, sweet, and nutty in the mouth. Delightful.

Knappogue Castle 1995 Single Malt Whiskey (\$40) This whiskey shows a translucent, floral malt flavor with more citrus than grain; drinking it is like drinking lemon pound cake, in a good way.

Midleton Very Rare 2008 Vintage (\$134) A blend of several very old whiskeys (some of which have as many as 25 years on them), with some younger ones folded in for sprightliness. More complex than the Jameson 18-year-old and particularly pleasant because of the way the bright, citrus peel notes of the younger whiskeys intertwine with the musky-sweet, orange blossom honey notes of the older ones.

Bushmills 10 Year Old Single Malt Whiskey (\$34) My favorite of the Bushmills single malts—indeed, of the entire tasting—happened to be the venerable Northern Ireland distillery's youngest. Lively, fresh acidity lies atop a cushion of barley sweetness: the quintessence of "moreishness". If you like a darker whiskey, you might prefer the chocolatey 16-year-old or the spicy, leathery 21-year-old.

Redbreast 12 Year Old Pure Pot Still Whiskey (\$47) A textbook old-school Irish whiskey: musky and bready in the nose, silky and smooth and surprisingly light on the palate.





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SOURCE

Briny Bites

Galician seafood, fresh from the tin

BY SOFIA PEREZ

THE IDEA OF PREPARING an appetizer just by opening a can might sound hopelessly 1950s to many Americans (SPAM, anyone?), but in Spain the practice remains as common as arguing about politics. There, some of the finest seafood is often served right from the tin. The best of this seafood comes from the northwestern region of Galicia, where the catch that emerges from the area's cold, turbulent waters has been prized for centuries for its superior quality. A local canning industry was born there more than two hundred years ago to preserve the perishable bounty.

Up to now, I've had to travel to Spain to savor the finest of these briny delicacies, but recently I tasted some from Los Peperetes, a Galician company that exports to the United States. There were cockles that tasted simply and utterly of the sea; plump, earthy mussels enrobed in a vinegary escabeche sauce; and succulent razor clams. Each was every bit as good as those I've had on Spanish soil.

Like many Galicians, Los Peperetes's owner and founder, Jesús Lorenzo, began getting his hands wet when he was a little boy, gathering cockles for his grandfather's canning company. He eventually took up canning, too, but on a smaller scale: all the company's seafood is cooked in small batches and packed by hand. "When the business started, in 1993, we produced only 20 cans per day," recounts Lorenzo's daughter Belén. The company was also the first to can delicate percebes (gooseneck barnacles still in their shells), which command a particularly high price because of the risks faced by the *percebeiros* who retrieve them from the rocks in often deadly surf.

Los Peperetes's other selections include exquisite baby squid and octopus, which Belén says can be heated in the olive oil they're packed in and served with rice or potatoes, though she maintains that the company's other offerings, in saltwater or vinegar, are best eaten with nothing more than a chilled glass of albariño (political debate optional). Tins of Los Peperetes's seafood range from \$13.95 to \$64.50 each. To order, call La Tienda at 800/710-4304 or visit www.latienda.com.

Clockwise from top left: baby sardines, cockles, gooseneck barnacles, baby squid, white clams, a sealed can of razor clams, mussels in escabeche sauce, and octopus.

MICHAEL KRAUS



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KITCHENWISE



Room to Grow

In this New York kitchen, cooking is only part of the show

BY EUGENIA BONE PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI

SUNDAY LUNCH IS A BIG deal in our family. Quite a group shows up at the home of my parents, Edward and Elinor Giobbi, in Katonah, a small town north of New York City—three grown children, their spouses, five grandchildren, and a rotating cast of other regulars—and we all dine in the kitchen. Until recently, that made for cramped quarters. The countertops were so crowded that garnishes would go missing for days. The table we ate at was actually three tables pushed together, and the wineglasses tipped over when placed on the cracks between them. My mother had to climb onto a counter to retrieve the platters that she stored in a cabinet above the fridge. The old Garland stove smoked.

It hadn't always been that way. In the 1920s, when the big stone house was built, kitchens were for cooking only. But once my parents moved in, in 1961, they expanded the room to accommodate a table for six and made the kitchen

the center of activity in the house. My father, a painter who had lived in Italy in his youth and always appreciated the pleasures of the table, loved to cook with friends. Although a proper living room was just through the swinging door, no one used it. Food was the entertainment, and the action was in the kitchen.

A decade later, my parents expanded the kitchen again to fit a table for ten, yet the improvements couldn't keep pace. As more grandkids arrived, the house's back door became the de facto front door, and soon all foot traffic in and out of the house led directly past the stove, causing countless near-misses with boiling water and hot skillets. When we sat down to dinner, the backs of our chairs rubbed up against my dad's oil paintings, which were too big for the wall.

It wasn't just Sunday meals that had pushed the old kitchen to its limits. For years it was also a mecca for Italian-food aficionados. My father, who was also a cookbook author (see "How We Learned Italian," page 34), was helping to bring down the spaghetti-and-meatballs autocracy that had, up to then, dominated Italian food in this country. Through his cookbooks and friendship with the *New York Times* restaurant critic Craig Claiborne, who wrote about him often, he introduced home cooks to pesto, extra-virgin olive oil, and other foods that have since become staples in kitchens across America. Dad was not professionally trained, but he learned from the masters of Italy's *cucina della nonna*—mothers, grandmothers, and aunts—and he believed that home kitchens could produce food as fine as that served in the best restaurants. Our kitchen was a living example of that philosophy.

Suffice it to say that the space was used hard; the kitchen that Claiborne had called "one of



Elinor (center) and Edward Giobbi (behind Elinor) prepare lunch with the author (in brown dress) and family and friends, left. Above, the author in the same kitchen, circa 1969.

EUGENIA BONE is the author of *Well Preserved* (Clarkson Potter, 2009). Her most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "Urban Harvest" (August/September 2008).

KITCHENWISE



Clockwise from top: Sunday lunch with family and friends; the new Garland stove with six burners and an overhead broiler; Giobbi at the kitchen sink.

the handsomest and best equipped in America", was, by the early 2000s, more than a little run-down. The wiring suffered a kind of peripheral neuropathy, delivering dimmer light every year. The refrigerator seeped and the linoleum floor buckled. Things finally came to a head one Sunday in 2003, when Dad and I collided on the way to the table and a plate of linguine with blue crabs splattered to the floor. At the end of that meal, as we took shifts scrubbing tottering stacks of dishes in the tiny sink, my mother announced that the kitchen needed to be redone.



THE PROSPECT OF DISASSEMBLING and rebuilding the kitchen was daunting for my parents. The space was an archive of memories; it had been host to grand potlucks attended by the great chefs of my folks' era—Pierre Franey, Jacques Pépin, Jean Vergnes—as well as scores of artists, actors, and writers. As we packed up the contents of the old kitchen, my siblings and I helped my mom and dad separate sentiment from refuse, unloading a virtual time capsule of culinary fads: a fondue rig from the 1960s (never used), a sprout maker from the 1970s, all sorts of fancifully designed corkscrews, and bulky espresso machines from the 1980s.

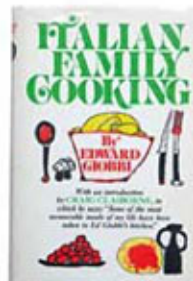
My husband, Kevin, an architect, oversaw the renovations. The house's back entrance was

shifted to just beyond the kitchen, the dining space was expanded, and part of the wall between the kitchen and the living room was opened up to let the rooms flow together. The cabinets and counters were reconfigured, the kitchen rewired, the floors surfaced with Italian tile, and the old Garland traded in for a new model. There was even more wall space for Dad's paintings. And at the center of it all was a custom-made, 14-foot-long yellow-pine table.

The first time we reconvened in the freshly completed space for a Sunday lunch, the whole family was able to sit together comfortably. We ate fried whitebait, spaghetti with a sweet sauce made from chicken giblets, braised rabbit served with a platter of broccoli di rape, and a lemon meringue pie—all of it brought to the table without so much as a dropped fork. We had plenty of counter space and cabinet doors that actually shut. We could *see* stuff. We could *find* stuff. It was, as my father put it, "an entirely new experience".

How We Learned Italian

In 1971, Edward Giobbi published a book called *Italian Family Cooking* (Random House), filled with rough, ebullient illustrations done by his three young children (including Eugenia Bone, author of the accompanying article). Giobbi's message was life changing for those of us who were toiling through Julia Child. He said that you could eat splendidly if you used fresh, high-quality products and did as little to them as possible. What he was describing was, of course, the Italian way, but most Americans didn't know that yet. Two years before the publication of Marcella Hazan's seminal cookbook *The Classic Italian Cook Book* (Harper's Magazine Press, 1973), Giobbi introduced us to eggplant caponata, brodetto with mussels, and eggs with wild mushrooms: the dishes he ate with his family here and in Italy. With him we also began to learn the importance of local, seasonal foods. "We were just awakening to all of this," says Judith Jones, who edited two of Giobbi's later books. "I loved the fact that his cooking was so connected with the earth, to what he grew and foraged." Writing *Italian Family Cooking* changed Giobbi's life as well as ours. "That book made me aware of how important it is not to mess with traditional recipes," he told me recently. "Keep them as close to the original as possible, because you can't make them better." —Irene Sax





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MEMORIES

Love Conquers All

In a Brooklyn barrio, one Puerto Rican grandmother was a force of nature

BY ERICK S. SIERRA

MAMA CRUZITA IS THE first on her feet in the morning darkness. By five o'clock—about the time roosters would be crowing in Quebradillas, her native village in Puerto Rico—my grandmother is rushing around our Brooklyn apartment, setting the coffee to boil in the *colador* and rousing me and my siblings from bed with her daily wake-up call: “*¡En un minuto se quema una casa!*” (“It takes only a minute for a house to burn down!”) It is her way of saying that you have to rise early and seize the day if you want to make it in this country. “*¡Tú no te criaste con leche pedi'a!*” she admonishes. “You weren’t nursed on charity milk.” It is 1982; I am eight years old.

By the time the sun comes up, the chicken for tonight’s dinner—my grandmother’s famous rendition of *arroz con pollo*, or chicken with rice—has finished marinating in Mama Cruzita’s special *adobo*, and her homemade stock, made from the tough and tasty meat of a hen purchased at a live-poultry market down the street, is already simmering on the stove. Throughout my unhappy third-grade school day, I will daydream of Mama Cruzita in our kitchen: she’ll be sautéing salt pork, releasing its flavorful fat, before stirring in cilantro, sweet little *ajicito* peppers, and manzanilla olives to make her *sofrito*, the seasoning mix that will give tonight’s dish its Puerto Rican character. By the time I come home from school, she’ll be blending in the *achiote*, or annatto seed, which will turn the rice a golden yellow. At five o'clock, she’ll add the chicken and stock to her *sofrito*, and a rich, spice-filled aroma will waft down our building’s hallways and through the streets of our barrio.

ERICK S. SIERRA teaches English at Rutgers University; this is his first story for SAVEUR.

Our neighbors will know that Mama Cruzita is cooking—people in the barrio talk about her *arroz con pollo* with reverence—but no one will dare interrupt her to ask her for a taste, for my grandmother is a *brava*, a fighter. Her feet tell tales of years she spent walking barefoot. When she was a young woman, men sparkling with promises eventually lost their sparkle, forgot their promises, and disappeared. In 1951 she left her seaside village for New York’s “streets of gold”—the run-down blocks of



Cruz Deida Seda with the author, her grandson, at an amusement park in New Jersey, circa 1975.

Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Life has toughened Mama Cruzita. Brow furrowed, head raised high, she inspires biblical fear. Even the local cops are afraid of her. She reserves her love for her cooking and her grandchildren.

When I was five months old, I’m told, Mama Cruzita came early to pick me up at the babysitter’s. She found me alone, flapping about on the floor, abandoned amid crumbs and dust. The babysitter trailed in: “Oh, I just went to the corner bodega to buy a can of

sofrito.” Mama Cruzita’s nostrils flared. “*¡Cómo te atreves!*” (“How dare you!”) Swooping me up, she crushed a ten-dollar bill into the babysitter’s hand and said that from this day on she would take care of me herself. “*¡Ningún nieto mío!*” (“No grandson of mine!”) With a flourish, she slammed the door behind her.

Brava.

But that is not the woman I come running home to after school on that spring day in 1982. I find Mama Cruzita working tranquilly in the kitchen, enveloped in the scents of Caribbean cooking. In the wooden mortar that she brought with her when she left Puerto Rico, she grinds more ingredients for her *sofrito*: garlic, peppercorns, oregano. She pounds in beats of four: up, down, around, down. Cilantro, cumin, salt. Up, down, around, down. She pauses and gazes at a pigeon resting on the fire escape but directs her words at me. “Papito,” she whispers, “I see in your eyes how you suffer.” Resuming her work: “But this will make you better.”

It does. The chicken, infused with the intricate flavors of the *adobo* and *sofrito*, is vibrant in my mouth, an intimate connection to the Puerto Rican countryside that my grandmother left behind. Mama Cruzita tosses some extra pieces of the crisp, savory skin of the salt pork onto my plate. I crunch into them eagerly. She reads my silences like emotional Braille and tells me what I need to hear. “*M’hijo*,” she whispers. “*Tú eres el amor de mi vida*.” (“My child, you are the love of my life.”)

Now, years later, I write down these memories just feet from where Mama Cruzita once cooked, in the apartment where I grew up and now live. The kitchen is empty. A flash of recollection: her eyes connect with mine; she smiles. Mama Cruzita, I tell her, you were a *brava* to them, but to me you are the tender embrace that holds who I am and never lets me forget.



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CLASSIC

The Real Alfredo

An iconic pasta dish returns to its roots

BY TODD COLEMAN

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A FAN OF fettuccine alfredo, but I recently tried a version of that classic Italian dish at a New York City restaurant—named, appropriately enough, Alfredo's—that caused me to see this old standby in a whole new light. Though rich with butter and melted parmigiano-reggiano, it was far lighter than any iteration I'd had before, more silky and refined. The ribbonlike egg noodles retained their bite, and their earthy taste wasn't drowned by sauce. I was astonished by the clarity and complexity of the flavors: the sweetness of the butter, the nutty boost from the cheese. I took it for granted that cream was in there somewhere; alfredo always had cream, and besides, how else could the cook have achieved such a luscious sauce? But when I talked with him, he told me that the pasta had been tossed with nothing more than butter and cheese.

Suffice it to say that this wasn't the dish I'd grown up with. As a teenager, I used to make fettuccine alfredo while working as a cook at an Olive Garden restaurant. A pan of the

white cream sauce, so thick you could stand a spoon in it, sat near my station, ready to be ladled over plates of boiled noodles. When no one was looking, I'd dip breadsticks into the sauce as a snack. Looking to re-create the dish at home, I found a recipe in my mother's *Betty Crocker's Cookbook*, but the sauce it produced was dishearteningly bland. After that, I'd order the dish from time to time in Italian restaurants

I WAS ASTONISHED BY THE CLARITY OF THE FLAVORS: THE SWEETNESS OF THE BUTTER, THE NUTTY BOOST FROM THE CHEESE

when I wanted something creamy and satisfying. Following my discovery of the creamless alfredo, however, my curiosity was piqued. Which was the real alfredo?

CREAM, IT TURNS OUT, WAS NOT a component of the original dish. The recipe was invented at another Alfredo's, a humble Roman restaurant opened by a man named Alfredo di Lelio just after the turn of the 20th century, on the via della Scrofa near the Tiber River. As the story goes, after di Lelio's wife gave birth to their son, she lost her appetite. Di Lelio, determined to get her to eat, transformed his fettuccine al burro—a homely preparation of pasta tossed with butter and parmesan—by increasing significantly the amount of butter he used. The result was a more lavish dish, which neither his wife nor his customers could resist.

In the restaurant's heyday, the dish was prepared tableside, with much theatrical flourish, to the accompaniment of a tenor and a violinist. A tangle of steaming fettuccine, fresh from the pot, was placed on a warm platter dotted with pats of sweet butter. As the heat from the noodles and the platter melted the butter, a smiling and mustachioed di Lelio, clad in a white coat, gracefully lifted and twirled the fettuccine with a gold fork and spoon, pausing to mix in copious amounts of finely grated parmesan. No wonder the chef earned the nickname *Il Maestro*.

Both the dish and its creator quickly became famous in Rome, but they remained virtually unknown outside of Italy until 1927, when George Rector, an American restaurant owner, writer, and bon vivant, sang their praises in his *Saturday Evening Post* column, which contained an account of a meal at di Lelio's restaurant. "Alfredo



A waiter preparing fettuccine alfredo tableside at the original Alfredo's restaurant, in Rome, in 1949.

CLASSIC

doesn't make fettuccine," Rector wrote. "He doesn't cook fettuccine. He achieves it." That same year, the Hollywood couple Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Mary Pickford honeymooned in Rome and were seen frequently at the restaurant. Back home, the movie stars wowed guests with the dish at Pickfair, their Beverly Hills mansion, while Rector continued to write about di Lelio and to publish his recipe in cookbooks and articles.

In 1943, di Lelio sold his restaurant on the via della Scrofa to one of his waiters and retired. But in 1950, as Italy was emerging from the shadow of war, Il Maestro returned, opening a new Alfredo's, on the piazza Augusto Imperatore. Dining there on di Lelio's famous fettuccine became de rigueur for the ever increasing numbers of American tourists traveling to Rome, and restaurants on this side of the Atlantic began to pick up on the trend. So did food packagers: by 1966, the Pennsylvania Dutch-brand noodle company was marketing "Fettuccine Egg Noodles", which came with a recipe for Alfredo's sauce. It called for half a cup of cream and a quarter cup of swiss cheese, in addition to the butter and parmesan. Like many pasta dishes that migrated to the United States, this one was becoming richer—and more Americanized.

One explanation frequently put forward for the emergence of a heavier fettuccine alfredo is that the butter and parmesan available in the United States during the 1950s were so inferior to their Italian counterparts that cream was required to give substance to the dish. My own hypothesis is that the cream (as well as, in some versions, flour and even cream cheese) provided a shortcut for achieving the kind of silky sauce created by laborious tableside tossing. To get to the bot-

tom of the matter, I decided to compare two versions, American style and Italian style, side by side.

First, I developed a simple cream sauce that was based on a composite of a number of alfredo recipes from restaurants and cookbooks. It combined one and a half cups of heavy cream, two tablespoons of butter, and two ounces of finely grated parmigiano-reggiano, along with a pinch of nutmeg for sweetness. I reduced about half the cream along with the butter in a skillet until a thick sauce formed. Then I added cooked pasta to the skillet and tossed it with the remaining cream and the cheese until the sauce clung to the noodles. The cream did make for a smooth sauce, but the flavor was flat and the texture was heavy.

Then I turned to di Lelio's original, which was remarkably easy to reconstruct because it employed only three ingredients: fettuccine, butter, and parmigiano-reggiano. By studying the accounts of food writers like Rector and Clementine Paddleford, I was able to glean crucial information about di Lelio's method for tossing the noodles. His tableside performance was more than mere showmanship: the warmed platter, in combination with a gentle but constant tossing motion, ensured that the butter and cheese melted and melded thoroughly; preparing the dish right there at the table meant that diners tucked into the noodles while they were still piping hot, before the individual elements could cool or separate. It took me more than one try to master the technique (see "The Original Fettuccine Alfredo", below), but once I did, this fettuccine alfredo delivered all the complex flavors that the cream in the other version had masked, along with a lighter but still luscious texture. Moved by the spirit of Il Maestro, I couldn't resist taking a bow. 🎭



The Original Fettuccine Alfredo

Mixing the ingredients on a warmed platter will help them melt quickly to make a satiny sauce. For the best results, use dried pasta, which doesn't break as easily during tossing as fresh egg pasta does.

1 Bring a 6-qt. pot of salted water to a boil. Add 1 lb. dried fettuccine and cook, stirring occasionally, until pasta is al dente, about 8 minutes.

Meanwhile, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. unsalted butter (2 sticks) into thin pats and transfer to a large, warmed platter. Drain pasta, reserving $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pasta water, and place the pasta over the butter on the platter.

2 Sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. finely grated parmesan (about $3\frac{1}{4}$ cups) over the pasta and drizzle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the reserved pasta water.

3 Using a large spoon and fork, gently toss the pasta with the butter and cheese, lifting and swirling the noodles and adding more pasta water as necessary. (The pasta water will help create a smooth sauce.) Work in any melted butter and cheese that pools around the edges of the platter. Continue to mix the pasta until the cheese and butter have fully melted and the noodles are coated,

about 3 minutes. (For a quicker preparation, bring the reserved $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pasta water and the butter to a boil in a 12" skillet; then add the pasta, sprinkle with the cheese, and toss with tongs over medium-low heat until the pasta is creamy and coated, about 2 minutes.)

4 Serve the fettuccine immediately on warmed plates.

WISCONSIN BLUE

Never holds his tongue.

Not one for idle CHITCHAT. Blue doesn't waste time with social pleasantries. When ordering a bottle of red, he neither asks the sommelier for advice nor requests to see the WINE list. Pinot noir it is. That's Blue. He's bold, determined, and opinionated. To not LOVE him is to not know him. And to not know him is a crying shame.



In Deepest Italy

Tucked away near the bottom of the boot, remote Basilicata

IT'S BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS SINCE I first went to Matera and fell in love with a pepper. Not just any pepper, but the peperone di Senise, a sweet Italian red pepper with the complicated, smoked-caramel tang of a mild red Mexican chile. In Basilicata, a little-known region in south central Italy right between the toe and the heel, people dry the peppers on strings, like ancho chiles. Then they fry them until they're crunchy and oily, with a crisp and salty pop, and add them to pasta along with handfuls of pan-fried bread

BY FRANCINE PROSE PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN



inspires a passion for simple things





BASILICATA

crumbs to make a dish called pasta con peperoni cruschi e mollica frita. I still think it may be the best thing that I've ever eaten.

The peppers were a surprise. I'd gone to Matera not for the food but rather on a pilgrimage to the city itself, which I'd spotted in the background of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1964 cinematic masterpiece *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. What makes Matera so distinctive is that its medieval and baroque *centro storico* is divided by a kind of canyon lined with ancient caves, or *sassi*, carved in volcanic rock, in which Materans have lived for centuries and continue to live, though quite a few caves have recently been converted into luxury hotels and upmarket restaurants. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993, Matera, with a population of about 60,000, has changed dramatically yet retains so much of its original character that, if you take away the signs advertising guided tours of the *sassi* and the frescoed early Christian temples that pock the surrounding hills, you've got an art director's fantasy of what urban and domestic architecture might have looked like 2,000 years ago.

As a result, Matera has become the go-to location for anyone making a movie with a biblical setting. Pasolini sent his rebel Jesus out to roam the Basilicatan landscape decades before Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* wound its agonized way through the streets of the town. Most recently, *The Nativity Story*, an American-made picture released in 2006, brought its photogenic young Joseph and Mary to have their child here. An American woman who works as a guide in Matera told me that she had to disappoint a Texas family who had come to see the manger where Jesus was born.

Its current incarnation as the new Jerusalem of the Italian Mezzogiorno is only the most recent chapter in the history of a town where life was once much harder than it is today. In the 1930s, the writer Carlo Levi was sent from his home in Turin to Basilicata in a sort of Fascist internal exile. In his celebrated book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, he described his sister's visit to Matera, which she found to be a hellhole, drastically poor even by the standards of the poverty-ridden south. Twenty years later, postwar concerns about health conditions in the *sassi* (where extended families often lived together with their animals in a single cave) led to the construction of high-rises, to which the cave dwellers were forced to move, though legend has it that people kept sneaking back to reinhabit their old homes. And you can certainly see why. Rising up the face of mountains, moving through ten centuries in the space of as many blocks, dusted with lights in the evening, the historic quarter of Matera is among the most mysterious and beautiful places on Earth.

I tasted the pasta with peperoni cruschi in a Matera restaurant called Le Botteghe. When I asked for a translation of the menu item, the waiter said, "With peppers and bread. Very good." I couldn't imagine how such a thing could be all that special, but then again, some of my favorite Italian meals have involved menu descriptions that were beyond my language skills, my imagination, or both, so I ordered it anyway. The dish brought tears of joy to my eyes. I ordered it at lunch and dinner every day during that visit, and, for my last meal in Matera, I asked the waiter to forget the pasta and bread crumbs and just bring me a plate of those crunchy, oily, salty, fabulous peppers.

It was February. On a rainy Saturday morning, my husband, Howie,

and I left Matera for the coastal city of Bari. The manager of our hotel directed us to a supermarket where we could buy some of the peppers to take home. But we made a wrong turn, and after you've descended by car through an Italian hill town on a rainy Saturday morning, you don't want to turn around and drive all the way up again. I figured we could get some dried or fried peperoni di Senise in Bari.

I was wrong.

"You get that in Basilicata," all the Bari grocers said. "This is Puglia." We'd traveled all of 40 miles. The peppers—like much of the food in Basilicata—shrank the borders of the regional. The peperoni were local; I was going to have to accept that, but it wasn't easy. Later, I tried unsuccessfully to find them in Rome and, later still, when I got home to New York. From time to time, I'd search for them the way you might look up an old boyfriend's name in a phone directory in a distant city.

Next come plates of fresh ricotta, fried peppers, marinated vegetables, and cured meats. It's slow food, for sure, except that it has never been fast

This past spring, when my nostalgic longing became intolerable, we returned to Matera, where my love for the peppers followed the course of any great passion: reunited with the object of your affection, you find more to love about it than the object itself.

IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT ANY region would willingly choose to make do with what is basically a poverty cuisine. And yet, if what you like about Italian food is its confident simplicity and the cooks' intensely personal, multigenerational, positively spiritual relationship with good local ingredients, Basilicata is your place. The hills of this part of Italy—also known as Lucania, its Roman name—were (and to a lesser extent, still are) full of shepherds, and the typical menu features a lot of lamb, cured meats, and fresh-made local cheeses. But, oh, what cured meats and cheeses!

In the back room of a cheese shop in Matera called simply La Lateria are a few tables at which you can have lunch. A little girl who's been doing her homework gets up grumpily to make space for Howie and me as her father brings us glasses of Madrigale, a fantastic and inky wine made by a local producer from aglianico grapes grown in the volcanic soil of northern Basilicata. The basket of bread that follows is not just a basket of bread but, as every Lucanian will tell you, a basket of the special bread made with the area's own especially hard durum wheat, which local bakers transform into loaves with unusually crisp crust. Next come plates of cheeses so various and exquisite, it's as if the proprietors couldn't stand not letting you sample every extant species native to the local farmsteads: fingertip-kissing ricotta and pecorino, hard cheeses cured in wine, burrata spurting cream, jelly rolls of creamy mozzarella layered with equally creamy goat cheese mixed with arugula, mushrooms, or radicchio. It's slow food, for sure, except that it has never been fast.

On this visit, we stay at a hotel called the Locanda di San Martino, whose owners, an American anthropologist (*continued on page 51*)

Facing page, focaccia with tomatoes and olives (see page 56 for a recipe). Previous pages, the city of Matera at night.

FRANCINE PROSE is the author of *Goldengrove* (HarperCollins, 2008). Her most recent article for SAVEUR was "The Eggs and I" (October 2008).



Pasta with fried peppers and bread crumbs (see page 56 for a recipe) at Ristorante Le Botteghe in Matera. Facing page, dried peperoni di Senise.



Sweet Heat

Peppers of all kinds thrive in Basilicata's sunny, semi-arid terrain. Ever since capsicums started arriving in Italy from the New World in the 16th century, cooks in the region have used them in creative ways to lend variety and spice to their cuisine. There are slender diavolicchio (little devil) chiles, prized for their intense heat, and strawberry-shaped, spicy cerasello varieties, but the region's most celebrated pepper is the bright red, thin-fleshed peperone di Senise (pictured, in its dried form), which hails from an agricultural region between the Agri and Sinni rivers, near the city of Senise. In 1996, these peppers were granted I.G.P. (Identificazione Geografica Protetta) status, which narrowly defines the geographical region in which peppers sold under that name can grow and also the means by which those peppers may be cultivated and harvested.

Peperoni di Senise are a cornerstone of Basilicata's rustic, satisfying cuisine. Fresh, they're often sliced and added to sauces, stuffed with meat or local wheat berries, or grilled and preserved in oil. More often, the peppers are hung on long ropes and left to dry in the sun, which further concentrates their taste. Called peperoni secchi, these dried peppers lend sweet, smoky notes to soups, potato dishes, and frittatas. Cooks also pound the peperoni secchi in a mortar to extract their seeds, which are used as a spice. The dried peppers can also be pulverized into a sweet, paprika-like powder that's known locally as zafarano (saffron). Although zafarano is added to breads, soups, grilled meats, and vegetable dishes, it is primarily used as a seasoning and preservative for the region's famed pork sausages and hams. In one of its most delicious incarnations, the dried pepper is fried in olive oil to make peperoni cruschi, a brittle, salty, flavorful ingredient that's tossed with pasta and bread crumbs to make the region's signature dish (facing page). On their own, peperoni cruschi are Basilicata's most addictive bar snacks, perfect alongside a glass of earthy aglianico wine. —Dana Bowen



Clockwise from top left: lamb stew (see page 56 for a recipe); Matera native Filomena Lamanna; fava beans and dandelion greens (see page 56 for a recipe); braided mozzarella.



Treasures of Basilicata

Though the sweet local pepper called peperone di Senise (see “Sweet Heat”, page 47) may be the holy grail for some food-focused visitors to the southern Italian region of Basilicata, the area’s hills and valleys also lay claim to many other distinctive specialties. Among them are flavorful cured pork sausages, an especially hard variety of durum wheat that yields famously crusty breads and excellent pastas, and a multitude of handcrafted cheeses. Some of our favorite Basilicata ingredients (all available in the United States) include strascinati **1**, a fresh flat or rolled pasta with a rough texture (achieved by rolling the dough over a grooved wooden board called a *cavarola*); the pasta takes beautifully to the region’s robust meat and pepper sauces. Basilicata’s prized pistachios are ground with sugar to make crema di pistachio **2**, a sweet paste that’s served with cheese for dessert, along with local honeys and fruit preserves. Basilicata’s spicy caciocavallo **3** is similar to provolone

and is made from the full-flavored milk of the Podolico cows that graze in Basilicata’s mountains. Fagioli di Sarconi **4**, the local varieties of cannellini, borlotti, and other types of bean, are beloved for their velvety texture and earthy flavor. Our favorite canestrato **5**, a rich, round pecorino-style cheese made from sheep’s and goats’ milk that is also produced in the neighboring region of Puglia, hails from the small Basilicata town of Moliterno; aged for up to ten months in reed baskets, or *canestre*, it’s best grated over pasta. Antipasti platters in Basilicata include a range of preserved vegetables, such as roasted peppers **6**; small, hot peppers filled with anchovies **7**; and eggplant involtini **8**. And while Basilicata produces excellent cured pork sausages, we love the fresh coiled sausage known as luganeghe **9**, a variety that’s often sold at butcher shops in the States. (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for sources.) —Ben Mims



BASILICATA

(continued from page 45) named Dorothy Zinn and her husband, Antonio Panetta, send us to Lucanerie, which is the kind of restaurant that really gets it about the quality of the ingredients, the history of the region, the spirit of the cuisine. Chef Enza Leone oversees the ranges, while Franco Abbondanza, the young *padrone*, glides welcomingly between the tables, guiding diners through their encounter with shepherds' fare tweaked to satisfy the most discerning food lover. The menu comprises a savvy procession of antipasto plates: the greatest hits of Basilicatan cuisine—puréed fava beans topped with sautéed wild dandelion greens, local cheeses, and sausages—spiked with smart and creative touches.

Because it's spring and the weather's delightful, we walk more on this trip and discover the upper part of the city: the piazza Vittorio Veneto, where, from early evening till dusk, much of Matera's population turns out for *la passeggiata*, the evening stroll, that stately southern ceremony of courting, family, and friendship. At this time of year, you can

Everyone turns out for *la passeggiata*, the evening stroll—that stately southern ceremony of courtship, family, and friendship

also spend the evening watching the swirl and dive of falcons and sparrows over the *sassi*; it's thrilling, like watching an air show at which no one's going to crash.

Just off the main square is the morning market, where they're practically giving away cardoncelli, a delicious wild mushroom that's in season from late fall to early spring, sautéed lightly with a dusting of parsley and basil, in antipasti and pasta. And it's also near the piazza that we find the local tourist office, where a man named Giuseppe Giordano seems sincerely excited to hear of our mission to taste the unsung glories of

Materan cuisine. After making a few phone calls, he invites us to show up at his office at a quarter to eight the next morning. He tells us that's when the baker will be putting the bread—made with the special wheat (yes, we know)—into the oven.

At precisely 7:45, Signore Giordano pulls up (continued on page 54)

Facing page, produce merchant Domenico Centonze (at right) with a customer in the upper, or modern, part of Matera.

THE GUIDE

Matera, Basilicata

Dinner for two with drinks and tip:

INEXPENSIVE UNDER \$25 **MODERATE**

\$25-\$50 **EXPENSIVE** OVER \$50

WHERE TO STAY

HOTEL SANT'ANGELO Rione Pianelle (39/835-314-010; www.hotelsantangelosassi.it). Rates: \$225 double. This is as luxurious as cave dwelling can get: plush bedding, modern fixtures, stellar service, with a restaurant and even an art gallery on the premises.

LOCANDA DI SAN MARTINO via Florentini 71 (39/835-256-600; www.locandadisanimartino.it). Rates: \$115-\$170 double. In 2003, proprietors Dorothy Zinn and Antonio Panetta lovingly renovated this comfortable hotel, whose 28 rooms are built into the *sassi*, or caves, in the historic part of town.

WHERE TO EAT

DA MARIO via 20 Settembre 14 (39/835-336-491). Moderate. This bustling, casual neighborhood restaurant is a favorite of local families and businesspeople. The menu is traditional, with impeccably prepared local specialties like *pignata di agnello* and *strascinati* with mushrooms.

LA LATTERIA via Duni 2 (39/835-312-058). Inexpensive. This convivial *enoteca*, or wine bar, is

an excellent spot for sampling the region's robust antipasti offerings, from roasted peppers and marinated eggplant to handmade *soppressata* and *caciocavallo*, a cows' milk cheese made in both Basilicata and the neighboring region of Puglia.

RISTORANTE LE BOTTEGHE piazza San Pietro Barisano 22 (39/835-344-072). Moderate. This traditionally minded restaurant, located in a hotel carved out of the *sassi*, is a perfect choice for sampling Basilicatan favorites like *pasta con peperoni cruschi* and *mollica frita* (pasta with fried peppers and bread crumbs), a rustic masterpiece. There's also an excellent selection of wines from locally grown *aglianico* grapes.

RISTORANTE LUCANERIE via S. Stefano 61



(39/835-332-133). Moderate. This elegant restaurant celebrates Basilicata's *cucina tipica* by presenting the region's best ingredients—from foraged greens and onions to locally raised suckling pig—with a modern flair. Expect dishes like handmade *cavatelli* with wild cardoncelli mushrooms and a creamy *torta di ricotta*, or cheese cake.

WHAT TO DO

CASEIFICIO LUCANO via Cererie 26 (39/835-330-362). The mozzarella sold at this shop is made fresh on-site every day; it's silky and, often, still warm from the cauldron. You'll also find excellent fresh *ricotta* and aged cheeses like *pecorino* and *caciocavallo*.

PANIFICIO CIFARELLI via Istria 17 (39/835-385-630). Basilicata is famous for its breads, and Giovanni Cifarelli, the third-generation baker who owns this bread shop, is acknowledged to be the region's finest maker of them. Sample many varieties of *focaccia*, flat breads, savory biscuits, and breads whose famously crisp crust owes to the use of the local variety of hard durum wheat.

PASTA FRESCA via IV Novembre 8 (39/835-334-264). The name hardly needs translation. To shop at this establishment in Matera's modern upper district is to get a thorough primer in Basilicata's distinctively shaped local pastas, both fresh and dried, from the round *strascinati* to the flat *orecchiette*. All are handmade at the shop by the mother-and-daughter team Maria Caterina Giorgio and Doriana Locantore.



Matera's old city was built on the site of an ancient settlement that dates back to the Paleolithic era, thousands of years ago. The *sassi*, or stone caves in which many inhabitants still live, are carved into tuff, or volcanic rock. Over the centuries, a series of new buildings, roads, and walking paths have been built on top of and around the *sassi*, creating the impression of an urban maze.



BASILICATA

(continued from page 51) in his silver Fiat and drives us to Panificio Cifarelli, a bakery where workers are sliding loaves of bread into a wood-fired oven as large as my New York apartment. They've been working since one-thirty in the morning; this is the last batch they'll bake today. The handsome young Massimo Cifarelli tells us that the bakery has been in his family for three generations. In the front of the store are cases of crusty loaves, stacks of round focaccia studded with tomatoes and olives, and bags of cookies and savory crackers. Cifarelli offers us a choice from the pastry counter. I choose a warm sugared doughnut. Bravo.

Back in Signore Giordano's car, we rush off to a *latteria* called Caseificio Lucano, where cheese makers in spotless white tunics and royal blue aprons and caps are working in a surgically clean *laboratorio*, as cool and wet as the bakery's *forno* was hot and dry. Sloshing around in white boots, the workers are heating vats of milk whose curds will be set with drops of magic potion—an amber elixir, or rennet, to be more precise, extracted from veal intestines. The milk solidifies, curds form, the liquid turns elastic, and a worker named Damiano Vicheletto scoops up and hands us chunks of mozzarella, salty and warm from the cauldron. It's as fresh as mozzarella can get. Drying on trays surrounding the central workspace, the cheese assumes its usual form. But there's also provolone shaped into pigs and sharp *caciocavallo*, a cows' milk cheese that's formed into a ball and hung to dry until it forms teardrop-shaped delicacies, which are sold all over town. We watch Vicheletto braid a mozzarella with the confident bravado of a cardsharp or a magician, and as we leave, I regret not having asked to sample Caseificio Lucano's rolled mozzarella on the counter. I'm relieved when, the next morning, it shows up on the breakfast buffet at the Locanda di San Martino.

Signore Giordano concludes our tour at a shop called Pasta Fresca, where, aided by her daughter, Dorian Locantore, Maria Caterina Giorgio demonstrates the old-school way of rolling every piece of pasta by hand and shaping the pieces into the various forms, like rolled *strascinati* and knotted *strangolapreti*, that I've seen tossed with my beloved peppers. Before accepting our thanks and saying goodbye, Giordano takes us to visit his 97-year-old mother, Philomena Lamanna, in her simple, old-fashioned apartment overlooking the *sassi*. She offers to cook us a meal, but Signore Giordano has made reservations for Howie and me at Da Mario, a popular neighborhood

W A recipe for *strazzate*, chocolate-almond Basilicata cookies, at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE120

restaurant where they are preparing a special spring dish for us to try. The fragrant lamb and vegetable stew that arrives at our table that

evening has been slowly simmered and baked under a pastry crust in a clay pot known as a *pignata*, and it re-creates the traditional stews that shepherds used to make while tending their flocks.

The next morning, we are in those fields, at a farm and winery called Azienda Dragone, which Dorothy Zinn suggested we visit. Calm and soft-spoken, Michele Dragone strikes me upon our meeting as a happy man. He adores his family, his land, and the vineyard, which occupies a gorgeous site, a short drive from Matera; he owns the *azienda* in partnership with his siblings. He also loves his business, which was begun by his great-grandfather, who imported wine in barrels from Puglia to sell in Basilicata. His grandfather founded the vineyard, where Dragone has worked hard to combine tradition with innovation: sheep are still used to control the weeds that grow

between the rows of vines planted on about 100 acres, but he is crafting new-style wines, like a sparkling one from the *primitivo* grape, an ancient local variety from which *zinfandel* is descended. (See page 98 for more about Basilicata wines.)

The labels on several of the Dragone bottles make reference to La Cripta del Peccato Originale (The Crypt of the Original Sin), a ninth-century cave church on the Dragone land. Michele and his siblings used to play in the cave as children, and it's where the shepherds and their flocks sought shelter from sun and rain. The cave walls, Michele


tells us, are covered by frescoes, which were painted by early monks, and it's considered one of the most beautiful frescoed churches in the region. In recent years, Michele deeded the chapel to the state, which, in return, financed its restoration by the same experts who worked on the Sistine Chapel.

Dragone leads us to the church past rows of vines and plots of fava beans and artichokes grown for the family's own use. He flips on a light inside the church; the frescoes are gorgeous—images of the Virgin, the saints, the Apostles, the tree of good and

evil, Adam and Eve. After a while I notice that we've all started whispering. We've been stunned, almost into silence, by the beauty of the paintings, the health of the vineyard, the fava beans and the artichokes, the bees buzzing in the leafy gorge below the crypt where scientists have discovered plant and animal species thought to be extinct.

ON THE WAY BACK TO THE HOTEL from Azienda Dragone, we lose our way. As we drive back and forth along the same path, the weather in the car darkens with the stormy intensity of the long married, lost on the road. Finally, we stop for directions at a roadside stand where a theatrically mustachioed old man and his two daughters are selling mushrooms, cherries, and *peperoni cruschi*. Even though I've already bought several neat packages of the dried peppers in the gourmet shops in town, I purchase a huge string—five euros' worth—packed in a plastic bag. The old man gives us directions, but when it becomes clear that I wasn't sure exactly which “*destra*” and “*sinistra*” he meant, he jumps into his own car and beckons us to follow him to a spot from which we can't lose our way.

And so it happens that this love story ends happily. Miraculously, we were allowed to take the dried *peperoni di Senise* through U.S. customs. (Just as long as they're not fresh, the inspector at the Newark airport intoned.) Of the many helpful tips we got from Dorothy Zinn, the most useful was that you have to be careful when you're frying the peppers. The oil has to be hot enough to keep them from getting soggy but not too hot, or they'll burn. Howie got it right the first time, and now we are watching our precious supply dwindle as the peppers appear in pastas and sauces and, in the morning, fried with eggs.

Most miraculously of all, the peppers come—as plants tend to do, I guess—with their seeds attached. We've started the seeds in our garden in New York's Hudson Valley. I'm hoping they'll take kindly to the transatlantic migration. Meanwhile, it makes me doubly glad that my love for Matera had a chance to progress beyond my initial infatuation with its peppers. Even if we can grow our own, I still intend to go back. 

A close-up photograph of a tiger with orange fur and black stripes, looking directly at the camera. The tiger is surrounded by green foliage and branches, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

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But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

BASILICATA

**FOCACCIA AI POMODORINI***(Focaccia with Tomatoes and Olives)*

SERVES 8-10

This chewy focaccia is one of many excellent varieties sold at the bakery Panificio Cifarelli in Matera.

- 1 1/4 tsp. active dry yeast
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 3 1/2 cups flour, plus more for kneading
- 1 tbsp. plus 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 pints cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 lb. pitted oil-cured black olives
- Coarse sea salt

1 In a small bowl, combine yeast, 1 tsp. sugar, and 1/4 cup water heated to 115°. Let mixture sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together flour, the remaining sugar, and salt in a large bowl; form a well in center. Pour in yeast mixture, 1 tbsp. oil, and 1 cup warm water; mix into a stiff mass. Transfer dough to a floured work surface; knead until smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. Form dough into a ball and transfer to a bowl greased with 3 tbsp. oil; cover with plastic wrap and let rise until dough has doubled in size, about 1 1/2 hours.

2 Heat oven to 475°. Rub bottom and sides of a 13" deep dish pizza pan or a 12" cast-iron skillet with 2 tbsp. of the oil. Transfer dough to pan; flip to cover both sides in oil and flatten into the bottom of skillet with your fingertips. Cover skillet with a damp kitchen towel; set aside to let rise for 1 hour. Gently press tomatoes and olives into dough and sprinkle with salt. Drizzle dough with remaining oil. Bake until golden brown and cooked through, 30-35 minutes. Transfer to a rack to let cool slightly.

**PASTA CON PEPERONI CRUSCHI E MOLLICA FRITTA***(Pasta with Fried Peppers and Bread Crumbs)*

SERVES 4

The secret to making this hearty Basilicata specialty is to fry the dried peppers to a delicate crisp.

- 1/4 lb. country bread, cut into 1" cubes
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 8 dried mild chiles, such as peperoni cruschi di Senise (see page 100), guajillos, or pasillas, stemmed and seeded
- 4 anchovies, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 pints cherry tomatoes
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 lb. pasta, such as fusilli or strascinati (see page 100)

1 Heat oven to 325°. Bake bread cubes until hard, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a food processor; process into coarse crumbs. Heat 1/4 cup oil in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Add crumbs; cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, 8-10 minutes. Transfer crumbs to a bowl. Wipe out skillet; heat remaining oil over medium-high heat. Add chiles and toast, turning once, about 45 seconds. Transfer to a plate; let cool. Tear chiles into 1" pieces. Reserve oil in skillet.

2 Set reserved skillet over medium heat and add anchovies; cook, breaking them apart with a wooden spoon, for 1 minute. Add garlic and tomatoes; cover; cook, stirring occasionally, until tomatoes soften and burst, about 10 minutes. Mash tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat and set aside.

3 Bring a 6-qt. pot of salted water to a boil. Add pasta; cook until al dente, about 10 minutes. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup water. Transfer pasta and water to reserved skillet of tomatoes over high heat. Toss to combine; cook until sauce thickens, 1-2 minutes. Transfer pasta to a platter; sprinkle with bread crumbs and chiles; drizzle with a little oil.

**FAVE E CICORIE***(Fava Beans with Dandelion Greens)*

SERVES 6

Many restaurants in Matera serve versions of this creamy fava bean purée topped with dandelion greens.

- 1 lb. small dried, shelled, and split fava beans (see page 100)
- 1 tsp. chopped thyme leaves
- 4 cloves garlic, halved
- 5 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 lb. dandelion greens or escarole, ends trimmed, stems and leaves roughly chopped
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 tsp. crushed red chile
- Juice of 1/2 lemon

1 Put beans, thyme, and garlic into a 4-qt. saucepan with 6 1/2 cups lightly salted water. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium low; simmer, skimming occasionally, until tender, about 45 minutes. Transfer beans, cooking liquid, and 2 tbsp. oil to a food processor; pulse until smooth. Season with salt and pepper; set fava purée aside.

2 Meanwhile, bring a 6-qt. pot salted water to a boil. Add greens and cook until they're wilted but still bright green, about 2 minutes. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup cooking liquid. Heat

remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions and cook until soft, about 8 minutes. Add greens, reserved cooking liquid, and chile and cook until greens are soft, about 4 minutes. Season greens with salt and pepper and stir in lemon juice. Transfer fava bean purée to a platter and spoon greens over the top. Drizzle with more olive oil and the juices from the skillet.


**PIGNATA DI AGNELLO***(Lamb Stew)*

SERVES 6

Traditionally cooked under a pastry crust, this slow-simmered stew is just as delicious without one.

- 3 lbs. boneless, trimmed lamb shoulder, cut into 2" cubes
- 2 lbs. new potatoes, peeled and cut into 2" pieces
- 1/3 lb. pecorino cheese, cut into 1/2" cubes
- 1/4 lb. piece soppressata or spicy salami, cut into 1/4" cubes
- 2 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 4 sprigs thyme
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut crosswise into 1/4"-thick coins
- 1 large onion, roughly chopped
- 1 rib celery, chopped
- 1/2 head (about 12 oz.) curly endive or escarole, ends trimmed and roughly chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Combine ingredients in a 5-qt. dutch oven with 2 1/4 cups water. Cover pot with aluminum foil and then with the pot lid to create a tight seal. Cook over medium-low heat, shaking dutch oven occasionally, until the lamb and potatoes are tender and the juices have thickened slightly, about 2 1/2 hours.



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SOUL OF A CITY

IN ANCIENT ISTANBUL,
VIBRANT WORKING-CLASS
EATERIES THRIVE IN THE
HEART OF A MODERNIZING
METROPOLIS

BY ANYA VON BREMZEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN



Diners at Neden Urfa, a *kebabçı*, or kebab house, in Istanbul's Aksaray district.

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RITTY AND GLAMOROUS, secular and devout, antique and up to the minute, Istanbul is flooded with pleasure seekers these days, and no wonder. A former capital of Christian and Ottoman empires, this sprawling metropolis has it all: history to give Rome a run for its churches and statues, water panoramas to rival Hong Kong's, and a many splended cuisine all its own. At times, I'm swept along with everyone else into the jet-setting restaurants and boutiques of some newly gentrified enclave. But I also have my own, private Istanbul. Having fallen in love with the city over years of visits, I recently bought an apartment overlooking the Bosphorus, the strait that separates Europe from Asia. I do much of my hanging out now in my leafy neighborhood of Cihangir, famous for its sidewalk cafés and fin-de-siècle apartment buildings. And off the tourist trail, I delight in watching the city's new gloss dissolve into a black-and-white cityscape veiled in *hüzün*, a feeling defined by the novelist Orhan Pamuk as a kind of collective nostalgia for the vanishing, crumbling past.

Hüzün. It envelops the battered old pickle shop near my house and mingles with the city's signature perfume of exhaust fumes and fresh mackerel being grilled out on the ferry docks. Setting out to explore this other Istanbul, I revisit mosques and bazaars, pause at tea gardens by a weedy Byzantine ruin, or just ride ferries all day to take in again that magical skyline spiked by rocketlike minarets. And when I eat, it's not in the manner of Ottoman pashas but like regular *Istanbullus*, digesting the city's past through its evocative

One of many Istanbul restaurants specializing in köfte (meat patties) and other spiced meats.

ANYA VON BREMZEN's most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "The Émigrée's Feast" (April 2008).



E CEVAPİ RAZNİCİ SA

KÖFTE PO
TAVUK
ETLİ YEM
SİZELİ ETLİ
TAVUK YE





TURKISH DELIGHTS

The panoply of pastries and sweets found in Istanbul's pastry shops and restaurants includes many specialties, such as helva and delicately layered baklava, that are common to neighboring Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines, but Turkey's collective sweet tooth also has a special character that can be traced back to the imperial kitchens of the Ottoman sultans. During much of the Ottoman era, honey was preferred to sugar as a sweetener, though today you'll find many Turkish sweets dusted liberally with sugar. **Künefe** ① is a sheep's milk cheese-and-shredded phyllo dough pastry (see page 74 for a recipe), usually drenched in sugar syrup and often topped with crushed pistachios and dollops of kaymak, the very thick Turkish cultured cream. **Su böreği** ②, one of hundreds of versions of the filled pastry called börek that are found across the Mediterranean, is a savory, layered cheese pie made with phyllo-like dough (called yufka). In Istanbul alone, you can find scores of varieties of **baklava**, the classic baked, nutmeat-filled sweet found across the Near East; the ones made with pistachios ③ and walnuts ④ are among the most popular in the city. **Kemalpaşa** ⑤, a luscious baked semolina-and-cheese confection that's similar to the Indian dessert gulab jamun, is often sold in grocery stores in a dried form, to be heated in syrup at home. Chewy, jellylike **lokum** ⑥, commonly known in America as turkish delight, are colorful starch-and-sugar confections that are often flavored with rose water or lemon. Creamy puddings, like **firin sütlaç** (baked rice pudding) ⑦, are also loved by Istanbulites. —David McAninch



The unique patchwork of flavors found in Istanbul's workaday restaurants hints at the city's cosmopolitan Ottoman past

everyday restaurants.

With its succulent kebabs and simple grilled fish, its healthful vegetable stews and bright salads, along with all manner of meze (small dishes), from stewed white beans to stuffed mussels (see "A Bounty of Small Plates", page 67), Istanbul's food is easy to love. The local cuisine has much in common with the cooking of the Middle East and the Balkans: a reliance on yogurt, an emphasis on braising or grilling, a skill with stuffed vegetables, and a penchant for eggplants, legumes, bulgur, and rice. But Istanbul's food has its own unmistakably urban identity, too. Its patchwork of flavors and eating styles reflects both Turkey's shared nomadic heritage and the city's past as the capital of the cosmopolitan, multicultural Ottoman Empire, which attracted vast waves of migrants.

In its Ottoman heyday, *Istanbullu* cuisine was lavish indeed. After Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror sacked Christian Constantinople in 1453 and renamed it Istanbul, he equipped his Topkapi palace with a domed kitchen so vast that it could have been mistaken for an imperial mosque. Delicate and refined, Ottoman court cooking was also highly specialized; separate guilds of chefs were assigned to the making of particular genres of dishes: *köfte* (meatballs), kebabs, pilafs, or, say, *helva*. Today, Istanbul's eateries reflect that specialization: you have skewered lamb at a *kebabçı* (kebab joint), fish at a *balıkçı* (fish house), *börek*—the savory pastries fashioned from layers of paper-thin yufka, a phyllo-like dough—at a *börekçi*, and *boza*, a thick fermented-bulgur drink, at a *bozaçı*. Alcohol? The city's secular-minded bohemians do their drinking—plus plenty of eating—at *meyhanes*, raucous taverns traditionally run by non-Muslim minorities.

MANY OF THE BEST *meyhanes* reside in the very heart of one of the city's trendiest neighborhoods, Beyoğlu. This European-inflected district lies across the Golden Horn estuary from the imperial mosques of Sultanahmet, the historic old city where the metropolis

began its life as Byzantium and lived on as the seat of the Ottoman Empire until 1923, when the modern Turkish republic was born. Since Byzantine times, colonies of foreign traders have made Beyoğlu their playground, and the tradition persists. These days tourists do their shopping and clubbing along İstiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu's main promenade (see "A Storied Boulevard", page 70), flanked by former embassies and ornate Art Nouveau buildings. But off in the side alleys, history hangs on in the *meyhanes*, where old-timers wash down their mezes with the potent, anise-based liquor called *raki*.

The owner of my favorite *meyhane*, a gruff, cigarette-puffing 85-year-old named Refik Arslan, attributes his vigor to a daily dose of

Refik Arslan, above, the owner of Refik Meyhane, a traditional tavern in the Beyoğlu district.

that 80 proof spirit. Arslan tells me that when he came to Istanbul from Turkey's Black Sea region at the age of 18, newspapers were speculating about whether Istanbul's population would ever reach a million. "Now it's, what," Arslan muses, "12 million?" Back in those days, this section of Beyoğlu was home to thousands of migrants: German engineers, Serbian waiters, hard-drinking Russians. Little Paris, the area was dubbed.

Appropriately, Arslan's establishment, Refik Meyhane, has the timeless air of a Parisian bistro. The food here and at nearby *meyhanes* deliciously ties together the many strands of





Each morning I **practically sleepwalk** to my local *çay bahçesi*, or tea garden, where I'm free to linger beneath the grape arbors forever

Istanbul's polyglot past. Those irresistible morsels of fried liver with parsley-and-onion salad? That's arnavut ciğeri, or Albanian liver. The tomatoey cold bean or fish stews called pilaki? A souvenir from the Greeks. Also on a typical *meyhane's* mezes tray: a mayonnaise-drenched Russian salad; a layered, sweetly spiced Armenian chickpea pâté called topik; and Circassian chicken in a creamy walnut sauce, from the Caucasus.

LIKE OTHER *ISTANBULLUS*, I develop a stubborn, irrational devotion to particular joints and food rituals. Each morning I practically sleepwalk to my local *çay bahçesi* (tea garden), where Cihangir's intellectuals crowd around tables laid out beneath tree branches and grape arbors, all shadowed by our green neighborhood mosque. At a *çay bahçesi*, you order your tulip-shaped glass of sweet çay (black tea) and are free to linger forever. I usually take along a breakfast of feta, cucumbers, olives, and simit, a sesame-crusted, ring-shaped bread sold as a snack by street vendors all over the city. Two hours later, when the wood-burning oven is fired up at the corner dive, I'm back at the tea garden with my midmorning lahmacun: a pliant, smoke-tinged oval of dough topped with a faintly spicy smear of ground meat, sprinkled with lemon juice, and rolled around parsley sprigs and tomato slices.

For lunch, I dash across the traffic-choked intersection for mantı (dumplings) at Özkonak, a worn storefront wedged between trendy cafés. Over tin bowls of red lentil soup, a trio of cops are talking soccer. Greek-speaking ladies, remnants of Cihangir's once substantial Hellenic community, order their usual kabak graten (zucchini under a blanket of gratinéed béchamel). My mantı arrive: tiny, toothsome meat dumplings (versions of which appear across Turkey and Central Asia) bathed in tart yogurt and enriched with

Mezes, or small plates, are standard fare at lively meyhanes like Munzur, left, in Beyoğlu.



ISTANBUL

a flourish of chile-and-mint-infused butter.

Özkonak belongs to a cardinal genre of Istanbul eatery, the *esnaf lokantasi*, a rudimentary merchants' canteen offering sustenance to shopkeepers and city workers. The *esnaf* setup rarely varies. There's always a guy who hails you with a loud "*Hosgeldiniz!*" ("Welcome!") Always a portrait—or six—of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the stupendously photogenic, sartorially splendid founder of the Turkish Republic. Ordering is easy: just point to the cold cases and steam tables and nod.

For a truly encyclopedic selection of *esnaf lokantasi* fare, I go to a place called Kanaat, near the ferry landing in Üsküdar, a bustling working-class district on Istanbul's Asian shore.

In a big, somber room that seems lost in the 1970s, I tour the food displays, ravenously plotting my lunch. Everything one wants to know about Turkish cuisine is here, somewhere. I find *zeytinyağlı*—green beans, artichokes, celery root, or other vegetables braised in olive oil until luscious and spoon tender—and every kind of stuffed vegetable: cabbage, peppers, eggplant and grape leaves filled with meat or sweetly spiced rice. In the glassed-in kitchen, cooks make Uzbek lamb-and-carrot pilaf, stewed white beans, all types of *köfte*, and *yahni*, earthy stews of lamb, tomato, and eggplant. By the entrance, sweets glisten in their dark amber syrup. Fragrant quince chunks, bread pudding with sour cherries—it's a trauma to choose.

The owner of one of my favorite canteens says that older customers weep because his goats' milk ice cream transports them to their childhood

Bahadır Kargili, one of the owners, tells me that his grandparents founded Kanaat Lokantasi in 1933 after coming from Albania during the reign of the last sultan. Back then, he says, Albanians in Istanbul were famed for their dairy treats, such as *muhallebi* (milk pudding) and a thick cultured cream called *kaymak*. The family started out peddling helva and ice cream from a cart, and regulars still line up for Kanaat's frozen offerings, particularly the goats' milk vanilla ice cream, which derives its chewy, elastic texture from *sahlep*, the powdered root of a wild mountain orchid. Old people, Kargili says, come in and weep because the ice cream transports them back to their childhood. Ah, Istanbul.

A PILLAR OF ISTANBUL'S foodways is its *kebabçı*, or kebab joints; indeed, most visitors consider grilled meats and their tangy accompaniments to be among Istanbul's native foods. But spicy skewered lamb, chiles, hummus, and other Middle Eastern fare are actually fairly new to the city, the consequence of a vast influx of migrants from southeastern Turkey in the early 20th century. Easterners still command the grills of the city's best-known *kebabçı*, including the fashionable Tike, in the well-heeled Levent district, and Hamdi, an old-school lamb bastion where skewers come framed by a breathtaking view of the Süleymaniye Mosque. Wanting to delve deeper into Istanbul's kebab subculture, I one day enlist my friend Soner Karababa and a pal of his, a grill chef named Hariye Usta, to lead me on an expedition to Horhor, a kebab-centric street in the crowded, predominantly Muslim Aksaray neighborhood.

Riding in Soner's car through a welter of slapdash, low-rise concrete buildings, we pull in to a shabby strip mall lined with *kebabçı*. We pass up one called (continued on page 70)

A server at Vefa Bozacisi, a beverage parlor near the grand Süleymaniye Mosque, fills glasses of boza, a rich fermented-bulgur drink, left.





A BOUNTY OF SMALL PLATES

Small dishes or appetizers, known as mezes, are a component of meals (or, sometimes, a meal unto themselves) in many eastern Mediterranean countries, from Greece to Lebanon; the tradition likely originated in ancient Persia, where full-flavored mezes were eaten as a way to offset the bitter taste of young wine. The Turks—and *Istanbul* especially—have a particularly deep love of mezes, of which there are dozens of varieties to be found in Istanbul alone. Often consumed at *meyhanes*, or taverns, along with raki, the strong anise-based spirit, Turkish mezes reflect, in miniature, the breadth of Istanbul's cuisine. Some, like the popular zeytinyağlı pirasa (leeks stewed in olive oil), are served at room temperature; others, like the ubiquitous börek (fried or baked phyllo-like dough filled with cheese, meat, or spinach), are served hot. They range from simple salads to cooked dishes. Pictured above is a mezes platter served at Refik Meyhane, a tavern and restaurant in Istanbul's Beyoğlu neighborhood. Luscious **tarama** 3 is a purée of bread, milk, and the smoke-cured roe of gray mullet or cod (it is a cousin of the Greek

roe spread called taramosalata). **Karişik turşu** 6 is a mix of salty pickled vegetables. **Rus salatası** 1, or Russian salad (also sometimes called American salad), is potatoes, carrots, and peas mixed with mayonnaise. Eggplant, a staple in Mediterranean cooking, stars in numerous Turkish mezes: cut lengthwise, fried, and served in a tomato sauce, it becomes **patlıcan tava** 8; blackened over a flame, peeled, and mashed with garlic, lemon, and (often) yogurt, it makes **patlıcan salatası** 4, a smoky, baba gannouj-like dip. Beans are another pillar of mezes platters: **pilaki** 5 consists of barbunya beans braised in olive oil with onions, tomato, and lemon juice and served cold with chopped parsley; for **fava** 7, dried split fava beans are puréed and, often, molded into a mound or a wedge and topped with coarsely chopped dill. Offal, too, is a favorite on meze menus, from tender arnavut ciğeri (strips of liver sautéed and topped with onions) to **beyin salatası** 2, poached lamb's brains served chilled on a bed of lettuce and sliced tomatoes and dressed with olive oil, lemon, and chopped parsley. —Karen Shimizu





A vendor carries a tray of simit, a ring-shaped bread sold on the street and eaten as a snack all over Istanbul. Facing page, stuffed eggplant (see page 72 for a recipe).

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(continued from page 66) Cigeristan (literally, Liverstan) in favor of one named Neden Urfa (Why Urfa). Why? Because Urfa, a city near the Syrian border, is one of Turkey's kebab meccas and Usta's and Soner's hometown to boot. The interior of the place is a gaudy desert mirage, every inch of it festooned with toy camels and roosters, carpets, and faded posters of Anatolian pop singers, all of it filtered through a haze of wood smoke from the grills. We take a seat at a low table set with bowls of isot, smoky, rust-colored dried chiles that Urfans seemed to be hooked on.

Kebapçi meals usually follow a strict progression. Strong tulum cheese and puffy breads give way to içli köfte, torpedo-shaped fried

bulgur shells filled with spiced lamb. Then come lahmacun and, finally, skewers of meat accompanied by a pomegranate syrup-laced salad of tomatoes and herbs. Our minced-lamb urfa kebab is salty and coarse, but everyone loves the eggplant-and-meatballs skewers and the ciğer şiş, which alternates liver cubes with crisp but plush nuggets of sheep tail fat. In the Eastern tradition, we lubricate our meal with ayran, a refreshing yogurt drink. The best lands last: künefe, a miraculous, syrup-drenched cheese—and-shredded wheat pastry served with mirra, the molasses-thick and bracingly bitter Arabian coffee.

"No, no! Don't put your mirra cup down!" Soner cries. "Urfans say that if you do, you'll


have to fill it with gold or marry the server!" The server is 16 and no pop star, so I just wave my cup in the air.

IF ISTANBUL'S *KEBAPÇI* evoke the culture of Turkey's Arabic-influenced eastern fringes, a fish feast alongside the Bosphorus at a *balıkçı* is a journey westward, a reflection of the long-nurtured European tastes of Istanbul's secular elites. "People would go to a *balıkçı* to dress up, drink raki, feel worldly and elegant," my friend Engin Akin recalls. I'm having dinner with Engin and a group of friends at Kuyu, a 52-year-old, defiantly civilized fish place in the Bosphorus village of Arnavutköy, a 30-minute drive from central Istanbul.

Veteran waiters in white jackets and bow ties ceremoniously present mezes trays. Our table shares cubes of beyaz peynir, a feta-like cheese, and fresh green melon (the requisite raki accompaniment), along with boiled winter greens splashed with olive oil and the smoky and fluffy house patlıcan salatası, a grilled-eggplant spread. At a *balıkçı* one also eats lakerda, thick slices of cured bonito served with raw red onion, which cuts through the fish's buttery richness. After our mezes binge, the grilled fish seems like an afterthought—civilized folk eat either one or the other, Engin insists—but neither of us is able to pass up Kuyu's expertly grilled lüfer (bluefish).

After dinner, we stroll along Arnavutköy's waterfront. The neighborhood that climbs up behind us is a faded snapshot from another epoch, with teetering wood houses that lean out over the steep and narrow streets. I notice, though, that since my last visit, Arnavutköy's formerly splendid *yalis* (Ottoman summer mansions), with their wedding cake ornamentation, have been res-

More photos from Istanbul at SAVEUR.COM / ISSUE 120

cued from their *hüzün*-inspiring decay with spiffy coats of fresh paint. Other things have changed, too. "Arnavutköy used to be populated by Greeks and was buzzing with *meyhanes*," our friend Hulya says. Today, most of the Christian community, including the Greeks and their *meyhanes*, is gone. Hulya also remarks that when she first came to Kuyu, 30 years ago, the traffic-swamped road that separates the restaurant from the water hadn't been built yet. Everyone falls silent, each of us lost in a private reverie, as giant freighters slowly glide down the Bosphorus in the gathering dusk. 

A STORIED BOULEVARD



For a city that so famously straddles two continents—one shore lies in Europe, the other in Asia—it's not surprising that Istanbul's history is profoundly shaped by the cultural interaction between East and West. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Turkish Republic, in 1923, formally marking the demise of the Ottoman Empire, he introduced a Western alphabet and a Western-style political system on the one hand and, on the other, empowered a distinctly Turkish sense of identity. As the city grew, many of the city's non-Turkish minorities began to leave Istanbul, making way for waves of migrants from the rest of the country. Those newcomers brought foodways that were new to *Istanbul*, most notably a penchant for Eastern-style kebabs and Middle Eastern seasonings, which quickly became as beloved a part of the city's culinary landscape as the subtle braises, stews, salads, and pastries that were a legacy of Ottoman

court cooking. No single part of this sprawling metropolis more vividly embodies Istanbul's multicultural past than Istiklal Caddesi, the frenetic pedestrian avenue that slices through the heart of Istanbul's Beyoğlu district.

Originally called Cadde-i Kebir (Grand Avenue), in its 19th-century heyday the street (shown at left, circa 1920) was referred to by its European name, Grande Rue de Péra, and it served as Beyoğlu's own Champs-Élysées, lined with embassies and grand cafés. After a long period of decline, a recent wave of gentrification has sparked a commercial resurgence along the street, which is now home to electronics stores, clothing boutiques, and all manner of eateries, from global chain restaurants, Turkish fast-food outlets, and *ışkembeci* (tripe restaurants) to fancy coffee shops and glamorous rooftop bars—not to mention a few gastronomic relics of the street's European-inflected past. Near Istiklal's southern end sits Hacı Bekir, a dollhouse of a confection shop that specializes in lokum (turkish delight). Nearby is the 1840s-era Markiz Pâtisserie, once a hangout for intellectuals and still furnished with gorgeous Art Nouveau murals. Farther up the street you'll find Rejans, a venerable restaurant founded by Russian émigrés. And, adjacent to the magnificent Çiçek Pasajı (Flower Arcade), is the lively Balık Pazarı, or fish market, where you can buy grilled bluefish, fried mussels, and, from stalls in the market, outstanding kokoreç (skewered lamb offal) sandwiches that probably taste just as good as the ones served here a hundred years ago. —David McAninch

ISTANBUL

THE GUIDE

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WHERE TO STAY

MISAFIR SUITES Gazeteci Erol Dernek Sokak 1, Beyoğlu (90/212-249-8930; www.misafirsuites.com). Rates: \$250 double. In the shopping, eating, and entertainment district of Beyoğlu, right off the grand İstiklal Caddesi pedestrian boulevard, this new seven-room hotel, run by a Dutchman with a flair for modern design, is a gratifying discovery. The enormous rooms are sleekly stylish and packed with modern amenities.

SEVEN HILLS HOTEL AND RESTAURANT Tevkifhane Sokak 8/A, Sultanahmet (90/212-516-9497; www.hotelsevenhills.com). Rates: \$180 double. If you'd like to stay in the historic district of Sultanahmet, in Istanbul's old city, but can't quite afford the Four Seasons, you'll have another option at this small hotel across the street, equally convenient to all the mosques and bazaars. The rooms are decorated with antique reproductions, and some boast beautiful views. The most astounding panorama is the one to be seen from the rooftop terrace.

WHERE TO EAT

FIRUZAĞA ÇAY BAHÇESİ Ağa Hamam Caddesi 1, Beyoğlu (no phone). Inexpensive. A favorite gathering place for writers, filmmakers, and other creative types, this shady tea garden, in the Cihangir neighborhood, is a great place to soak up the local ambience over glass after glass of sweet çay. Buy a lahmacun (a kind of Turkish pizza) at Kardesler, an adjacent food stall, to fortify yourself for exploring the surrounding stores and bakeries. Among the best are La Cave (Siraselvililer Caddesi 207), a shop that has a fine selection of Turkish wines, and Asri Tursucu (Ağa Hamam Caddesi 29A), an establishment devoted entirely to pickled vegetables.

HAMDİ Tahmis Caddesi 17, Kalçin Sokak, Eminönü (90/212-528-0390; www.hamdirestorant.com.tr). Moderate. Somewhat touristy, this stately grill house near Istanbul's famous Spice Bazaar never-

theless offers a good introduction to Istanbul's kebab culture. The main reasons to visit, though, are the gorgeous nighttime views of the nearby mosques; request a table on the upstairs terrace. Try the pistachio kebab, and pick up some baklava from the downstairs shop on your way out.

KANAAT LOKANTASI Selmanipak Caddesi 25, Üsküdar (90/216-341-5444; www.kanaatlokantasi.com.tr). Moderate. If you're staying in the old city or one of its neighboring districts, getting to this restaurant on the Asian side of the city will account for half the fun. A hulking white public ferry carries you across the mighty Bosphorus Strait, letting you take in magnificent views of Istanbul's mosque-studded European shore. Awaiting you at this big, unpretentious eatery is an exhaustive selection of



Turkish specialties. Make sure to end the meal with the house-made dondurma, a richly textured goats' milk ice cream made with a rare type of wild orchid.

KARAKÖY GÜLLÜOĞLU Mumhane Caddesi 171, Karaköy (90/212-249-9680; www.güllüoğlu.biz). Inexpensive. A short walk from the soaring Galata Bridge, in the Karaköy neighborhood, this shop, along with its attached café, is one of the city's most famous purveyors of baklava and börek (savory pastries).

KUYU Arnavutköy Caddesi 31-33, Arnavutköy (90/212-263-6750). Expensive. This elegant, time-burnished restaurant in the outlying village of Arnavutköy has memorable views of the Bosphorus, tasty mezes, and impeccably grilled fish.

NEDEN URFA Sofular Caddesi 56, Aksaray (90/212-533-8451; www.nedenurfa.com/anasayfa.html). Moderate. For a no-frills, truly authentic Istanbul kebab experience, head to this unpretentious grill joint in Aksaray, a working-class, heavily Muslim section of town. The lahmacun and the ciğer şiş, or liver kebab, are terrific; so is the künefe, a wondrous dessert of shredded wheat pastry and cheese that's topped with kaymak, a thick, rich cultured cream.

ÖZKONAK Akarsu Caddesi 47 (90/212-249-1307). Moderate. This cozy example of an *esnaf lokantasi*—a working-class lunch canteen—has homey entrées (the mantı, or meat dumplings, are famous), creamy puddings, and yogurt thick enough to stand a spoon in. After lunch, drop by Antre Gourmet, a fabulous cheese shop, a few doors down, at number 40 on the same street.

REFİK MEYHANE Sofyalı Sokak 10/12, Asmalı Mescit, Beyoğlu (90/212-243-2834). Moderate. One of the city's most famous *meyhanes* (taverns), this bustling, half-century-old local favorite has walls plastered with newspaper clippings and photos of well-known customers, as well as a selection of tasty mezes and grilled meats. Try the arnavut ciğeri (Albanian-style liver and onions).

SUBAŞI Çarşıkapı Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 8 (90/212-522-4762; www.tarihisubasi.com). Moderate. If you're entering Istanbul's legendary Grand Bazaar via the Nuruosmaniye Gate, its main access point, hang a quick right, and you'll run into this modest lunch counter popular with bazaar vendors. To order, just inspect the dishes displayed by the kitchen and point.

VEFA BOZACISI Katip Çelebi Caddesi 104, Vefa (90/212-519-4922; www.vefa.com.tr). Inexpensive. This 133-year-old shop and café, with its gorgeous, well-preserved interior, specializes in boza, a thick and famously nourishing fermented-bulgur drink developed in Turkey centuries ago. It also has excellent lemonade and a handful of bottled specialties, including thick, flavorful pomegranate syrup.

ISTANBUL

**KARNIYARIK***(Stuffed Eggplant)*

SERVES 6

Briefly frying the eggplants for this classic dish softens their flesh, making them easier to stuff.

Canola oil, for frying

6 Japanese eggplants (about 2 lbs.), ends trimmed

4 tbsp. unsalted butter

1 lb. ground lamb

1 tbsp. tomato paste

1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon

6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

1 small yellow onion, roughly chopped

1/2 green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and finely chopped

2 medium tomatoes, cored and finely chopped

1/2 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

1/4 cup chopped mint leaves

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Pour oil into a 12" skillet to a depth

of 1/2". Heat over medium-high heat until the oil is shimmering and very hot. Working in 2 batches, fry eggplants, turning occasionally, until softened, 6–8 minutes per batch. Transfer eggplants to paper towels to let drain; discard oil and set aside.

2 Melt butter in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add the lamb and cook, breaking the meat into small pieces with a wooden spoon, until lamb is browned, about 8 minutes. Add the tomato paste, cinnamon, garlic, onions, and peppers and cook, stirring frequently, until onions are soft and golden brown, about 8 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook until they're soft, about 6 minutes. Stir in the parsley and mint and season with salt and pepper. Remove skillet from heat and set lamb filling aside.

3 Heat oven to 475°. Halve reserved eggplants crosswise to make 12 pieces. Working with one piece at a time, cut a lengthwise, 1/4"-deep incision in the eggplant to make a pocket (be careful not to cut all the way through the bottom). Lightly season inside of each eggplant pocket with salt and pepper and spoon about 1/4 cup lamb filling into it, pressing filling lightly into pocket. Arrange stuffed eggplants in a 9" x 13" baking dish and bake until hot, about 5 minutes. Serve warm.

SHREDDED PHYLLO DOUGH

Shredded phyllo dough (called *tel kadayif* in Turkey)—essentially the same delicately layered pastry as regular phyllo but processed into thin strands for a shaggier texture—is the base for many crunchy, sticky desserts across the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. In the Turkish pastry called *künefe* (shown on page 74), shredded phyllo is paired with fresh cheese and drizzled with sugar syrup; in the Greek pastry known as *kataifi*, the dough is stuffed with chopped walnuts, almonds, or pistachios and scented with orange or rose water. The ingredient is equally versatile for savory pastries. Made from nothing more than flour and water and usually sold frozen, it will dry out quickly if not properly handled and stored. Brushing shredded phyllo with melted butter before baking helps to prevent sticking and cracking and gives desserts like *kataifi* their golden color. Thawed shredded phyllo should be stored in the refrigerator under a damp towel and wrapped tightly in plastic wrap; it will keep for about a week. Frozen shredded phyllo, like the kind made by Apollo (pictured), a Greek company, can be found in the freezer case of most Middle Eastern food markets and in specialty stores. —Leah Koenig

**GAVURDAĞI SALATASI***(Tomato Salad with Herbs and Pomegranate)*

SERVES 6

This dish is a perfect garnish for falafel and is also delicious on its own.

3/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

1/2 cup chopped mint leaves

1/4 cup finely chopped red onion

3 tbsp. pomegranate molasses (see below, right)

3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice

2 tbsp. chopped fresh thyme

1/2 tsp. dried ground Aleppo pepper or paprika (see page 100)

8 scallions, finely chopped

6 medium tomatoes, cored and finely chopped

2 large banana peppers or Italian frying peppers, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 tsp. ground sumac, for garnish (see page 100)

Stir first 11 ingredients together in a large bowl; season with salt and pepper. Garnish with sumac and serve.

**ETLİ KURU FASULYE***(Stewed White Beans)*

SERVES 6–8

Cooking these beans with a lamb shoulder chop, a flavorful cut of meat,

will give this entrée a richer texture.

2 cups dried white beans, such as cannellini

2–3 chiles de árbol

2 medium yellow onions (1 halved, 1 finely chopped)

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 6-oz. lamb blade chop

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 large banana pepper or Italian frying pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

1 1/2 cups tomato sauce

1 tsp. dried ground Aleppo pepper or paprika (see page 100)

1/2 tsp. dried oregano

2 medium tomatoes, halved and grated, skins discarded

1 3/4 cups chicken broth

Kosher salt, to taste

1 lemon, cut into wedges

POMEGRANATE MOLASSES

Sweet and tart, with the jammy sweetness of ripe fruit and the tangy bite of an aged balsamic vinegar, pomegranate molasses lends its distinctive flavor to many Mediterranean dishes, including the tomato salad with herbs and pomegranate shown above left. Most pomegranate molasses (including Alwadi Alakhdar, pictured) comes from the Middle East, though American versions are now being made in California and Arizona. In the making of pomegranate molasses, the juice of sour pomegranates is mixed with sugar and sometimes lemon juice, then boiled down until it's a thick syrup. The subtly flavored condiment can also be drizzled over ice cream, incorporated into cakes and candies, and added to cocktails in place of grenadine syrup; indeed, old-fashioned grenadine is nothing more than a syrup of pomegranate boiled with sugar. (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for a source.) —Ben Mims





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ISTANBUL

1 Put beans into a 6-qt. saucepan, cover with 10 cups water, and let soak overnight. Add chiles de árbol and halved onion to the pan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until beans are tender, about 1 hour. Discard onion and drain beans and chiles; set aside.

2 Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over high heat. Add lamb and cook, turning once, until browned, 8 minutes. Add remaining onions, garlic, and banana pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 8 minutes. Add tomato sauce, aleppo pepper, oregano, and grated tomatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is very thick, about 10 minutes. Add chicken broth and the reserved beans and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the flavors have melded, about 15 minutes more.

3 Transfer lamb to a plate and chop it into small pieces; discard bone. Return lamb to saucepan. Season beans with salt; ladle beans into bowls and squeeze lemon wedges over the top.

**MERCIMEK ÇORBASI**

(Red Lentil and Bulgur Soup with Chile-Mint Butter)

SERVES 6

This soup is finished with a flourish of mint-and-chile-infused butter.

- 5 **tblsp. unsalted butter**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ **tblsp. cumin seeds**
- 2 **cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 1 **medium onion, roughly chopped**
- 1 **tblsp. tomato paste**
- 3 **medium tomatoes, halved and grated, skins discarded**
- 4 **cups chicken broth**

- 1 **cup dried split red lentils (also called masoor dal), rinsed and drained**
- $\frac{1}{3}$ **cup coarse bulgur**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 1 **tblsp. dried mint leaves, crumbled with your fingers**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ **tblsp. dried ground aleppo pepper or paprika (see page 100)**

1 Melt 2 **tblsp. butter** in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add cumin, garlic, and onions and cook, stirring, until onions are soft, about 8 minutes. Increase heat to high, add tomato paste, and cook, stirring frequently, until color darkens, about 3 minutes. Add grated tomatoes and cook until mixture thickens slightly, about 3 minutes more. Add broth, lentils, bulgur, and 4 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until lentils are tender and soup has thickened, about 45 minutes. Season soup with salt and pepper; remove pan from heat, set aside, and cover.

2 Meanwhile, melt remaining butter in a 1-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Remove pan from heat and stir in the mint and aleppo pepper. To serve, ladle soup into bowls and drizzle with chile-mint butter.

**URFA KEBAB**

(Spiced Lamb Kebab)

SERVES 4

Wide, flat metal skewers are ideal for grilling this style of ground-meat kebab (see page 100 for a source). The spiced meat mixture can also be formed into patties if you don't have skewers.

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ **lbs. ground lamb**
- 6 **tblsp. grated onion**

- 2 **tblsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 4 **tblsp. dried ground aleppo pepper or paprika (see page 100)**
- 1 **tblsp. kosher salt**
- 2 **tsp. ground cumin**
- 2 **tsp. dried oregano leaves**
- 2 **tsp. dried mint leaves, crumbled with your fingers**
- 1 **tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

1 Combine lamb and onion in a large bowl; set aside. Heat oil in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Add aleppo pepper, salt, cumin, oregano, mint, and pepper and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 45 seconds. Pour the spice mixture over the reserved lamb mixture and mix thoroughly with your hands.

2 Divide lamb mixture into 4 portions and roll each into a thin cylinder about 10" long and 1" thick. Slide a flat metal skewer (see page 100) into each cylinder and press the meat around the skewer. Transfer skewers to a parchment-lined baking sheet and refrigerate for 30 minutes to firm up.

3 Meanwhile, build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium-high (alternatively, heat broiler and position rack 7" from heating element). Grill or broil the kebabs, turning once, until browned and nicely charred on the outside and medium on the inside, about 4 minutes per side.

**KÜNEFE**

(Shredded Wheat and Cheese Pastry in Syrup)

SERVES 6

Shredded phyllo dough (see page 72) can be found in the freezer aisle of Middle Eastern markets (see page

100 for a source). Queso blanco or mozzarella is a good substitute for the firm sheep's milk cheese used in many Turkish pastries.

- 1 **cup sugar**
- 8 **whole cloves**
- 8 **cardamom pods, crushed**
- 3 **cinnamon sticks**
- 1 **lemon, thinly sliced crosswise into $\frac{1}{4}$ "-thick slices**
- 10 **oz. frozen shredded phyllo dough, defrosted and roughly chopped**
- 16 **tblsp. unsalted butter (2 sticks), melted**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ **lb. queso blanco or mozzarella, grated (about 2 cups)**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ **lb. ricotta (about 1 cup)**
- Greek yogurt or sour cream, for garnish**
- 3 **tblsp. ground pistachios, for garnish**

1 Bring the sugar, cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, lemon, and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water to a boil in a 1-qt. saucepan and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let sit for 10 minutes. Strain the syrup through a sieve set over a small saucepan, discarding solids, and set aside.

2 Heat oven to 375°. Put the phyllo and 12 **tblsp. of the butter** into a food processor and pulse until the mixture is just combined, about 30 seconds. Grease a 10" shallow pie pan with 2 **tblsp. of the butter**. Transfer half of the phyllo mixture to the pan and flatten it with a rubber spatula. Sprinkle the queso blanco over the phyllo mixture; then spread ricotta evenly over the top. Add remaining phyllo mixture on top of ricotta; flatten with a spatula. Drizzle top of phyllo mixture with remaining butter. Bake until golden brown, about 1 hour. Raise heat to broil and cook until crisp, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a rack and let cool slightly. Reheat syrup and drizzle over cake. Set aside to let syrup soak into cake, 4–5 minutes. Slice cake into wedges and serve topped with dollops of yogurt and sprinkled with pistachios.



HINTS OF RIPE RASPBERRY, CHERRY, DATES AND CINNAMON.

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BITTERSWEET



The Ice Queen

The rise, fall, and rise of America's favorite lettuce

BY IRENE SAX



Stir-fried iceberg lettuce. Facing page, iceberg salad with blue cheese vinaigrette. (See page 81 for recipes.)



ICEBERG

IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT ICEBERG LETTUCE has a bad rap. Mild tasting, pale in color, and sold wrapped in cellophane emblazoned with corporate logos, it is the white bread of the produce aisle. Criticized for being boring and bland, void of cachet, it has become something of a punch line, a metaphor for everything that was wrong about the way we used to eat. To many food lovers, the film director John Waters's quip

that iceberg is "the polyester of lettuces" isn't quite harsh enough.

But when I was young, all lettuce was iceberg. I didn't ask myself whether I liked it any more than I questioned whether I liked American cheese or red delicious apples. It was a given, a constant presence in the refrigerator, at the ready for shredding into salads and stuffing into sandwiches. Since then, I have fallen in love with all the worldlier lettuces that have become available over the years—bitter endive and peppery arugula, velvety mâche and prickly frisée—but I have to admit that there are times when no other leaf but iceberg will do. All snap and refreshment, with a taste like that of cool, sweet water, iceberg lettuce is the crunch in my BLT, the base for my zesty chopped salad, and even the grace note in my fried rice.

We tend to think of iceberg, which was invented in the United States over a century ago, as an all-American food—a garnish for burgers or, when cut into wedges and topped with blue cheese dressing, a perfect foil for juicy steaks—but some of the lettuce's most interesting uses appear in other cuisines. In her book *The Wisdom of the Chinese Kitchen* (Simon & Schuster, 1999), Grace Young includes a recipe for iceberg lettuce stir-fried with garlic, soy sauce, and black pepper that completely changed the way I think about the food; the high heat turns the leaves tender, glossy, and aromatic. "The Chinese, who love iceberg, stir-fry or braise it because they generally don't eat raw vegetables," Young told me, speculating that the ingredient became popular after it was introduced to Hong Kong in the 1960s. Today, in that city and other Western-leaning ones, like Shanghai, iceberg

lettuce is sometimes shredded and served as a base for pan-fried meats; its sturdy leaves are also used as edible cups for minced chicken, duck, or pork. What other lettuce could be put to work like that?

After learning about the many ways in which Chinese cooks have embraced iceberg, I became curious about the journey of this iconic American lettuce, at once so maligned and so ubiquitous in its native country. What are the real grounds for epicures' distaste for iceberg? Is it a genuine failing on the part of the food itself, or is it merely a case of culinary snobbery?

A SUBVARIETY OF THE family of lettuces known as crisphead (the other main types of lettuces are looseleaf, butterhead, and romaine), iceberg was developed from a kind of loose and leafy head lettuce called batavia by the Philadelphia-based seed company W. Atlee Burpee & Co. in 1894. The new lettuce was an instant sensation: while other batavia-derived crisphead lettuces of the day also formed spherical heads, their leaves were greener and not nearly so crisp; a head of iceberg, by contrast, was pale in color, densely packed, and protected by unusually sturdy outer leaves.

Some say that iceberg lettuce got its name from the way the heads stuck up out of beds of crushed ice in railroad boxcars. Not so, says George Ball, the chairman and CEO of Burpee, who asserts that the name refers to the heads' crunchy texture and whitish color. Indeed, a Burpee seed catalogue printed in 1904 touts iceberg's "thoroughly blanched" and "crisp" leaves. In that same catalogue, Burpee introduced a new sibling of iceberg called brittle-ice, which had an even milder, sweeter taste and a lighter color than the original iceberg varieties, qualities that appealed to Victorian tastes. In the

1940s, scientists eventually crossed brittle-ice with another crisphead variety to create the perfectly round, extremely compact, and ultracrisp iceberg called great lakes, which became hugely popular with farmers around the country.

By midcentury, iceberg lettuce—which plant breeders had engineered so that it was slow to wilt and easy to ship—had become a symbol of America's rapidly industrializing agricultural system. In 1955, John Steinbeck wrote an article for *Holiday* magazine about his hometown of Salinas, California, where the bulk of iceberg lettuce was grown (and still is). He described a community where iceberg was king: "Now we had a new set of upstarts: Lettuce People," he wrote. Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden*, which was published in 1952, echoed that theme: in the book, the writer depicts a failed iceberg lettuce enterprise as an example of an American farm family's overzealous ambition and a cautionary tale about the dangers of monoculture.

Before iceberg came along, lettuce was strictly a seasonal and local crop; now it was something that Americans could eat year-round no matter where they lived. Plentiful and cheap, it was instrumental in expanding the repertoire of American salads. The original, 1931 edition of *Joy of Cooking* (Bobbs-Merrill) hinted at the future; it contained numerous recipes for salads, virtually all of them of the fruit or gelatin kind—except one: a green salad consisting of iceberg lettuce cut into wedges. By the 1960s, new editions of the book featured numerous lettuce salads and praised iceberg as a green that "does not wilt". Iceberg became fashionable, whether in garden salads, chef salads, or the now legendary cobb salad, that hearty composition of chicken breast, avocado, bacon, and tomatoes, all of it buoyed by iceberg's hearty leaves. Invented in 1937 by Robert Cobb, the owner of Hollywood's Brown Derby restaurant, the salad possessed movie star glamour and the heft of a main course.

In the 1970s, iceberg lettuce served as a canvas for a number of special-occasion salads that took

Chinese minced chicken wraps, facing page (see page 81 for a recipe).

IRENE SAX's most recent article for SAVEUR was "Small Wonders" (November 2008).

ICEBERG

advantage of the ingredient's unusual hardness. "Wilted" iceberg lettuce salads (American cousins of Italian and French wilted dandelion salads) were made by dressing the leaves with hot bacon fat and vinegar; the leaves soak up the vinaigrette's flavor while maintaining their textural integrity. And there were "overnight" or "layered" salads that could be made the day before they were served. Whenever I was invited to a dinner party during that era, I'd pull out the big glass salad bowl I'd gotten as a wedding present and set to work filling it, covering

W A recipe for a steak house-style iceberg wedge salad at SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE120

the bottom with a bed of shredded iceberg and then adding tiers of sliced red onion, tomatoes, cubed cheese, peas, and hard-boiled eggs. I'd spread mayonnaise on top of it all, as though I were icing a cake, and put the bowl into the refrigerator to let the salad "set" overnight. The cheese was processed and the peas were frozen, but the result was gorgeous; the lettuce, ever crisp. There was never a morsel left at the end of the meal.

BY THE END OF THE 1970S, iceberg lettuce had begun its fall from grace in the United States, a decline caused in large part by the surging popularity of romaine, the star of such popular salads as the caesar. Americans were waking up to the reality that fresh vegetables were better than canned and frozen ones, and when it came to greens, more color was presumed to mean more nutrients. (To its credit, iceberg lettuce, though not so nutritious or high in fiber as romaine, is high in vitamin B.)

Other colorful lettuces soon followed. By the end of the 1980s in the United States, upscale restaurants were serving salads of baby lettuces, often given the French name *mesclun*. Italian restaurants featured "tricolor" salads of endive, radicchio, and arugula. To feed diners' expanding (if Mediterranean-centric) appetites, farmers started growing more and more varieties of lettuce, taking advantage of improved shipping and packaging techniques that allowed even fragile greens to survive long-distance travel. Some of those greens were flavorful and delicate indeed; others had no flavor or crunch at all. Regardless, their precious shapes and bright colors were enough to make iceberg seem not only passé but unconscionably uniform and old-fashioned.

At the same time that iceberg lettuce was losing its cachet in the United States, however, it

was gaining in popularity around the world—both because it was considered chicly American and also because it was a profitable crop. In Mexico, where farmers began growing iceberg in the 1980s, the lettuce is used as a sweeter substitute for cabbage; *SAVEUR* contributing editor Rick Bayless says that cooks took to stirring iceberg into pozole soups or serving it on the plate with spicy foods as a garnish, or *ensaladita*.

In Scandinavia and in northwestern Europe, starting in the late 1970s, farmers began to grow varieties of iceberg; today the lettuce still often fetches higher prices than do other types in those parts of Europe. In Spain, France, and Italy, iceberg is raised for export. In Israel, the Middle East, Great Britain, and Australia, it's an important domestic crop and a common salad lettuce and garnish. But nowhere outside the United States has iceberg taken a firmer hold

Dr. Lettuce

Like any field, the science of plant breeding has its own pantheon of superstars. Foremost among them is Edward J. Ryder, the inventor of the most popular variety of the most popular lettuce in the world. If you've got a head of crisp iceberg lettuce in your fridge,



chances are it's a kind called *salinas*, and it's better than the iceberg your grandparents ate: it's more compact, it lasts longer, it has more flavor, and it comes in a greater range of colors and textures, from its dark green and supple outer leaves

to its crunchy, pale yellow ones. Ryder, a Bronx-born plant geneticist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (now retired), came up with this hardy hybrid in 1975, building on a legacy of crossbreeding that can be traced back to the very first iceberg variety, developed by Burpee in 1894 (above). Today *salinas* is grown all over the world, both conventionally and organically. Ryder, who is 79 and remains an avid gardener, lives in the California lettuce-growing town that gave his hybrid its name. "I try to be as humble as I can, but *salinas* was sensational," Ryder says. "Few breeds take off like *salinas* has. It made my reputation." —Ben Mims

than in Asia. In China, the world's largest producer of lettuce in the world, cooks cherish iceberg's resilient texture and add it to warm dishes like congee soups and fried rice. In Japan, locally grown iceberg has become a staple of the simply dressed salads that are often eaten for breakfast or as a refreshing side dish.

IN RECENT YEARS, I've started to sense the stirrings of an iceberg revival on our shores. On menus that used to serve microgreens, I now often find those comforting iceberg wedges and chopped salads (though I'm still waiting for a layered-salad comeback). What's more, small-scale farmers are beginning to cultivate some of the more colorful, flavorful, and nutritious varieties of *Lactuca sativa* (as iceberg lettuce is taxonomically known) that are currently being developed by agricultural scientists. Others are seeking out older, heirloom iceberg varieties, like great lakes, ice queen, and new york head, which have frillier leaves, larger heads, and more-supple textures. Still others are bringing to market newer varieties, like skyline, maverick, crystal, magenta, crispino, centennial, and summertime, that expand their customers' notion of what relatives of iceberg lettuce can look and taste like. Frieda's, a produce distributor based in Los Alamitos, California, that sells to upscale retailers around the country, has even started marketing "baby iceberg" lettuce that comes in softball-size heads.

At my farmers' market, on Manhattan's Upper West Side, iceberg is always the first lettuce to sell out. "About five years ago there were the usual stories about iceberg having no nutritional value, and we saw a dip in sales," said Jeff Bialas, who raises seven kinds of lettuces at his farm near Goshen, New York. "But it's come back. If we're out of it for a few weeks, customers will complain."

I've bought iceberg from Bialas; I love the fresh-picked flavor of the juicy white ribs and dark green outer leaves. Sometimes I chop and toss them with little more than some fresh herbs; other times I shred them for a refreshing slaw, in which the lettuce takes on the character of a demure napa cabbage. I might cleave the head into quarters and top them with my own, bold-tasting blue cheese dressing or even grill them so that they wilt slightly before I douse them with balsamic vinegar. Or I'll use the broad outer leaves as a base for grilled meat or hummus. However I dress up my iceberg, I'm transported, comforted, satisfied. 🍴

ICEBERG



ICEBERG SALAD WITH BLUE CHEESE VINAIGRETTE

SERVES 6

When making the vinaigrette for this bright-tasting, herb-flecked salad, use a crumbly blue cheese like cabrales or valdeón from Spain; creamier kinds like saga blue will melt into the dressing.

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

- 8 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 1/2 tsp. cracked black peppercorns
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 5 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 8 oz. blue cheese, crumbled
- Kosher salt, to taste

FOR THE SALAD:

- 3 radishes, thinly sliced
- 2 red chiles, preferably fresno or holland, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1 head iceberg lettuce, cored, outermost leaves discarded, inner leaves torn into 3"-wide pieces
- 1/2 English cucumber, halved and cut into half moons
- 1/4 cup tarragon leaves
- 1/4 cup flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1/4 cup chervil leaves
- 10 chives, cut into 1" pieces

① Make the vinaigrette: Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 10" skillet over medium heat. Add peppercorns and shallots and cook until shallots are soft, about 5 minutes. Stir in vinegar and remove pan from heat; let cool. Put two-thirds of the cheese into a medium bowl; add vinegar mixture and remaining oil. Season with salt; stir gently. Let sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

② Make the salad: Fill a large bowl with ice water. Add radishes, chiles, lettuce, and cucumbers and submerge.

Let sit for 5 minutes to crisp; drain and dry in a salad spinner. Transfer vegetables to a bowl; toss with tarragon, parsley, and reserved vinaigrette. Serve sprinkled with remaining cheese along with chervil and chives.



SHOON CHOW SAANG CHOY

(Stir-Fried Iceberg Lettuce)

SERVES 4

This fragrant stir-fry, a version of one in *The Wisdom of the Chinese Kitchen* (Simon & Schuster, 1999) by Grace Young, is a popular Chinese New Year dish.

- 1 tsp. soy sauce
- 1 tsp. sesame oil
- 1 tsp. rice wine or dry sherry
- 3/4 tsp. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 tbsp. peanut oil
- 4 scallions, cut on the diagonal into 1" pieces
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1/2 medium head iceberg lettuce, cored, outermost leaves discarded, inner leaves torn into 4"-wide pieces
- Kosher salt, to taste

① In a small bowl, combine soy sauce, sesame oil, rice wine or sherry, sugar, and pepper; set sauce aside.

② Heat a 12" skillet over high heat. Add peanut oil, half of the scallions, and garlic and cook until garlic is golden, about 5 seconds. Add lettuce; cook, stirring occasionally, until lettuce softens slightly, about 1 minute. Drizzle in sauce and cook until lettuce is just coated with the sauce, about 1 minute. Season with salt, divide between 4 bowls, and garnish with remaining scallions.



SAANG CHOY BAO

(Chinese Minced Chicken Wraps)

SERVES 4

This recipe was given to us by Bee Yin Low, who writes the blog www.rasamalaysia.com. (See page 100 for hard-to-find ingredients.)

- 1 lb. ground chicken
- 20 cashews, roughly chopped
- 3 dried shiitake mushrooms, softened in hot water, stemmed and finely chopped
- 3 scallions, 2 finely chopped, the green part of 1 julienned
- 4 tsp. soy sauce
- 1 tbsp. oyster sauce
- 1 tbsp. rice wine or dry sherry
- 1 tsp. cornstarch
- 1/2 tsp. sugar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. peanut oil
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 16 iceberg lettuce leaves
- Sweet Asian chile sauce

① Put chicken, cashews, mushrooms, and chopped scallions into a bowl. Combine soy sauce, oyster sauce, wine, cornstarch, sugar, salt, and pepper in a bowl. Pour over chicken; toss. Let marinate for 15 minutes.

② Heat oil in a 12" skillet over high heat. Add garlic; cook for 10 seconds. Add chicken mixture; cook, stirring, until browned, about 3 minutes. Transfer chicken to a bowl. To serve, spoon some of the chicken onto each lettuce leaf. Garnish with julienned scallion and a little chile sauce.



ICEBERG SLAW

SERVES 4-6

Make this slaw just before serving so that the lettuce is as crisp as possible.

- 2 tsp. cracked coriander seeds
- 6 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 2 tsp. honey
- 1 tsp. dijon mustard
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 medium carrots, julienned
- 1/2 head iceberg lettuce, cored, halved, and thinly sliced
- 1/4 red onion, thinly sliced

Put coriander into a 10" skillet over medium heat; toast, swirling, about 2 minutes. Transfer coriander to a medium bowl; whisk in oil, vinegar, honey, and mustard to make a smooth vinaigrette. Season with salt and pepper. Add carrots, lettuce, and onions and toss. Serve immediately.

SHOPPING AND STORING TIPS

The best place to buy iceberg lettuce is the farmers' market, where specimens have been picked within the last few days or even hours. Look for heads that are dense and heavy: if you're planning to serve the leaves intact, as in a wedge, it's best to buy dense heads that are firm when squeezed. Since iceberg consists of about 96 percent water, it's important not to store the lettuce in the coldest part of your refrigerator, where the leaves may freeze. If you use only part of the head, wrap the remaining section loosely in a paper towel and seal it tightly in a Ziploc bag; stored this way, it should keep for about five days. Although many people discard the tender yellow core and leaves, we find that their crinkly texture and appealing bitter edge make for great pickles and soup garnishes. —Jordan Schlotterbeck



Coming Home

Returning to Saigon, three sisters connect past and present

BY ANDREA NGUYEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARIANA LINDQUIST





Vendors at Saigon's Phú Nhuận market serve different kinds of sweetened sticky rice. Previous pages, Vũ Thị Nhân with a tureen of pork hocks simmered with bamboo shoots (see page 93 for a recipe).

SAIGON

**The
flavors
here are
more
vivid, the
scents
more
pungent.
But this
is just
life here.
This is
Vietnam**

HERE WE ARE, my sisters and I, in an air-conditioned cab, driving away from the same airport that my family fought to get into in April 1975, days before North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon. We haven't been back to the city together since. Yenchu chats with the cabdriver. The oldest of us, she was a teenager when we left Vietnam. She remembers the most and speaks Vietnamese the best. As for me and Tasha, the middle sister, our language skills are frozen at an elementary-school level. My memories of this city are a fever dream.

We're in the city center now. Amid packs of motorbikes that weave in and out of our path with a strange, fluid serenity, our taxi inches forward, giving us time to see, breathe, almost touch, the street scenes on either side of us. "This is nothing like Little Saigon," Tasha says, as we pass hawker stalls selling baguette sandwiches and steamed dumplings; I have a picture in my mind of that suburban Vietnamese enclave in Southern California, filled with brightly lit noodle shops and supermarkets, where we shopped and ate when we were growing up. It seems small and far away now. Through the taxi window I see produce stands stocked with vegetables and fruits I've not yet tasted; street vendors serving sweet soups made of tapioca, banana, and coconut milk; tiny storefront restaurants packed with diners eating platters of stir-fried crab.

Tasha sees a pile of ripe jackfruit as the taxi crawls past a street stall. "I haven't had it fresh in years!" she exclaims.

"I'll add it to our list," I promise her. We've come to Saigon to eat, and also to remember. They may be the same thing.

IT IS MARCH, and the heat is crushing. We check in to our hotel and find a cab to take us to the house of Mrs. Nhàn, a friend of our mother's. Mom used to take us here for bánh

cuốn: rolls made of gossamer-thin sheets of rice paper, filled with pork and mushrooms. We'd called ahead, and Mrs. Nhàn is expecting us. "You are family," she'd said. "Come whenever you like." A woman in her late 70s or 80s whom I don't recognize greets us at the door of her tidy storefront restaurant and home; it's she. We sit on plastic stools. I strain to remember the place but can't.

Mrs. Nhàn's daughter-in-law Ngân makes the bánh cuốn. Her tools are a ladle, a bamboo stick, and a stockpot of boiling water covered by muslin. She swirls a film of rice-flour batter onto the fabric and lets the batter steam and set. Deftly, she lifts the cooked sheet away with the stick and puts some of the pork-and-mushroom filling into the rice paper. So, I tell myself, this is how you make bánh cuốn without a Teflon skillet. Ngân places our bánh cuốn, topped with crisp fried shallots, before us. The rolls are chewy and soft, with the delicate sweetness of just-cooked rice. I remember this taste, this texture. I ask Mrs. Nhàn for the batter recipe. "I grind soaked rice, water, and some tapioca starch," she says. That's it.

Our first full day in Saigon—now called Hồ Chí Minh City, though none of the locals we meet use that name—is disorienting and exhilarating. Everyone looks like us; everyone has hair like ours, eyes like ours. And the food! The tastes and aromas and sights that we used to have to make a side trip for in the States are now everywhere, surrounding us, enveloping us. The flavors are more vivid, the scents more pungent, and yet it is the opposite of exotic. This is just life here. This is Vietnam.

Our lunch is bánh xèo, chewy-crisp rice-flour crêpes filled with pork, shrimp, and bean sprouts and eaten with fresh herbs. The versions of this food I know from America are plate size, but the ones served to us at this bánh xèo shop in the center of town are truly gargantuan and very good; just not what we were expecting.

We have a similar experience at dinner. Tasha declares that she wants the "quintessential Saigon phở experience", referring to the ubiquitous beef noodle soup. Tasha, a corporate lawyer, does not cook, but she is a passionate and opinionated eater. So we go to Phở Hoà, one of the oldest phở houses in Saigon. The soup that arrives at our table is definitely phở, but it comes with unfamiliar accompaniments: fermented pork sausages called nem, deep-fried Chinese crullers called dầu cháo quẩy, and pâtés chauds, savory puff pastries filled with pork. "Why are they serving these things with phở?" Tasha asks. "What do we do with them?" We watch the patrons at the tables next to us; some of them dunk the crullers into their soup; others nibble on the sausage and pastries between spoonfuls. They eat with gusto, with the same practiced movements my parents make when they have phở. We follow suit. The side dishes taste delicious with the star anise-infused broth.

Everywhere we go, cooks are *(continued on page 90)*

Facing page, top row, from left, catfish in caramel sauce with rice and choy sum greens (see page 92 for a recipe); a Saigon noodle vendor; a streetside haircut. Second row, a bust of Hồ Chí Minh; Yenchu Haduong in a taxi; lotus stem salad (see page 92 for a recipe). Third row, taking an iced-coffee break; a food vendor's sign; a schoolgirl. Bottom row, a street in the Binh Thanh district; Vietnamese coffee; serving sizzling rice crêpes (see page 92 for a recipe).



ANDREA NGUYEN is the author of *Asian Dumplings*, which will be published by Ten Speed Press in September.







Banana, coconut, and tapioca pearl soup (see page 93 for a recipe). Facing page, author Andrea Nguyen (middle) and her sister, Tasha Nguyen, at the home of Vũ Thị Nhân (right), dining on pork hocks simmered with bamboo shoots and lotus stem salad.

SAIGON

(continued from page 86) altering, amplifying, dressing up, or dressing down familiar dishes. The city we encounter is obsessed with the new, in a state of constant flux. This is not a bad thing, I tell myself, though it takes me a while to shake a sense of guilt. The trip was my idea, and I've led my sisters all this way to taste Vietnamese cooking in its truest form. But then, it's absurd for me to think that Saigon would wait for us, preserved in amber until we came back.

THE NEXT MORNING, pushing along crowded sidewalks beneath skeins of jury-rigged phone lines, brightly colored awnings, and corrugated-steel eaves, we find our way to our old house, in the Phú Nhuận district. To stand in front of the three-story building feels strange. The house is a preschool now; Disney cartoon characters are painted on the walls of

the entrance area. The staff won't let us in, maybe because they think we're Việt kiều (Vietnamese expatriates) returning to reclaim lost property. Tasha convinces them that we just want to look around for old times' sake, and they relent. I don't remember much about the place, though Tasha swears she's found the spot where the kitchen used to be. Yenchi looks for the tree she used to climb, but it is gone. Her memories flooding back, she leads us around the blocks of our old neighborhood. All the street names have changed.

"Come on," I say, "we're going to Phú Nhuận market." A short walk away we find the open-air bazaar where our mother used to take us shopping. There's asphalt under our feet now, instead of dirt, but the white noise of haggling shoppers and merchants awakens a vivid memory. The place feels the same: alive, bustling, but not chaotic. Produce

A Shopper's Guide



The recipes on the pages that follow are based on dishes I tried in Saigon, but all the ingredients I needed for making those dishes at home were found on a single shopping trip to the Westminster Superstore ① in Westminster, California, a suburb south of Los Angeles that's home to a large Vietnamese-American pop-



ulation. Most of these foods can be found in good Asian markets. First on my list were the lotus stems ② that I'd need for the lotus stem

salad. Called *ngó sen* in Vietnamese, the stems are usually sold cut into four-inch lengths and packed in glass jars, labeled "lotus rootlets", that are shelved near other canned vegetables and pickles. I made sure to buy the lotus stems packed in brine, not the pickled version, which



contains vinegar and sugar.

Several of the recipes called for the most essential of Vietnamese ingredients, *nước mắm*, or fish sauce ③. Like many big Southeast Asian supermarkets, the Westminster Superstore stocks dozens of different kinds. I looked for tall bottles containing a clear, reddish-brown liquid and bearing the Vietnamese words *cốt, nhĩ*, or *thượng hạng* on the label: designations that indicate a premium product made with the first extraction of liquid from the salted fish. I always go for the higher-priced brands; competition is fierce among producers of



this ingredient, and a mere 50-cent difference can mean you're getting a noticeably superior product. The Westminster Superstore also carries many brands of canned coconut milk ④, a key ingredient in the banana, coconut, and tapioca pearl soup. I went for my usual favorite: the especially creamy Mae Ploy brand. Next, I popped over to the flour and starch aisle to find the rice flour I'd need for the sizzling crêpes; I bought a one-pound bag of Erawan-brand regular rice flour, a kind that is almost always labeled with red lettering. (Glutinous rice flour, which doesn't work well for the crêpes, is usually labeled with green lettering.)

Finally, I shopped for my fresh ingredients. First, I went to the produce section to get the Vietnamese herbs ⑤ I'd be serving as a garnish for the sizzling crêpes; I picked perky-looking bunches

without damaged leaves. Next, I headed to the meat department to buy the pork hocks that I was going to simmer with bamboo shoots and then to the seafood counter to buy shrimp (for the sizzling crêpes and the lotus stem salad) and catfish (for the catfish simmered in cara-



mel sauce). I chose a whole gutted fish that felt firm and dense and had clear eyes and a clean smell. At last, I checked out ⑥ and took my bounty home. —A.N.




SAIGON

vendors pepper us with questions upon learning that we're Americans who were born nearby: Where was your house? Where do you live now? How old are you? Are you married? How many children do you have? The questions are personal, yet there's an odd intimacy between us. We may ask you such things, the vendors seem to say, because you are one of us. We, too, are burning with questions. Like all the Vietnamese-Americans I know who have gone back, my sisters and I are burdened by a recurring thought: What would life have been like if we'd stayed? One of the vendors tells us tearfully of the hardships and austerity of the years after the war. She says that times are better now, though, and that Saigon is full of optimism.

My sisters and I split up to visit different parts of the market. Tasha and Yenchí go off to find tropical fruits: pearlike sapodilla, sweet star apple, creamy custard apple, luscious mangoes, fragrant pomelo. I find tiny, pale green hoa thiên lý, delicate flower buds (called Tonkin jasmine) used in soups and stir-fries; before today I'd only read about them in books. After a while I take a seat at a quán bình dân, a workers' eatery, in the market. I order cá kho, fish steaks cooked in a rich coating of caramel sauce. This version is made in the southern style, with catfish and simmered in coconut water; the cook scatters a handful of scallions and chiles over the fish and serves it to me with tart, clear fish soup and sautéed choy sum greens. The meal makes me feel whole. When I meet up with Tasha and Yenchí again a couple of hours later, they too seem energized. It's late afternoon, and Tasha is hungry again. I know a place, I say.

The courtyard of Quán Ăn Ngon, the restaurant where we dine, is canopied by tree branches, shaded by canvas umbrellas. At the edge of the courtyard are cooking stations that look like street-hawker stalls. We walk from one to the other, look at the offerings, and return to our table to order. The whole, seducing story of Vietnamese cooking is here: the simple, honest flavors of the country's north; the gutsy, earthy soups and dainty court delicacies of Huế, the old imperial capital; the voluptuous, multilayered dishes and fresh seafood of the south. We cover our table with food: the southern favorite chạo tôm, grilled ground shrimp on sugarcane stalks; spicy bún bò huế, the famous beef and pork noodle soup from Huế; and ốc nhồi, steamed stuffed snails with lemongrass, from the north.

On our last night we return to Mrs. Nhàn's home. She and Ngân have cooked a farewell dinner for us. There is giò heo hầm măng, rich pork hocks stewed with bamboo shoots, and gỏi ngó sen, a southern salad of crisp lotus stems, shrimp, pork, Vietnamese coriander, and a fragrant celery called rau cần. I have used only jarred lotus stems in the United States, so Ngân gives me a lesson on splitting and washing fresh ones. We pull the dining table to the center of the room, open the front door, and sit down to eat. A warm evening breeze washes over us. Motorbikes buzz by outside. We fill our plates. Tasha takes a bite of the gỏi ngó sen. "I remember this!" she says. I try some too, and the flavors, so clean and bright, cut through the fog of the years. 

THE GUIDE

Saigon

Dinner for two with drinks and tip:

INEXPENSIVE UNDER \$10 MODERATE \$10-\$20

WHERE TO STAY

BONG SEN HOTEL 117-123 Đồng Khởi, District 1 (84/8-3829-1516; www.hotelbongsen.com). Rates: \$100 double. This hotel offers comfortable accommodations in Saigon's main shopping and entertainment district. Budget rooms are also available at the Bong Sen Hotel Annex, at 61-63 Hai Bà Trưng Street, in the city's center.

SOMERSET CHANCELLOR COURT 21-23 Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai, District 1 (84/8-3822-9197; www.somerset.com). Rates: \$150 double. The 172 "serviced apartments" in this sleek residential hotel are marketed to business travelers on extended stays, but the rooms—most of them furnished with modern, open-plan kitchens—are also a good option for tourists who want to be able to cook during their stay. The hotel is located very close to the touristy center of the city but not in the noisy heart of it.

WHERE TO EAT

BÁNH XÈO 46A Đinh Công Tráng, District 1 (84/4-3824-1110). Inexpensive. This modest, family-run restaurant, established in 1945, specializes in bánh xèo, sizzling rice crêpes filled with pork and bean sprouts. Its popularity has spawned imitators, including a similarly named business across the street that serves decidedly inferior fare.

BÁNH XÈO NGỌC SƠN 103 Ngô Quyền, P. 11, District 5 (84/8-3853-7486). Inexpensive. Rice crêpes—in this case gigantic ones cooked in woks—are also the specialty at this open-air restaurant in the Chinatown neighborhood. The place is the busiest at night, when large families and noisy groups of friends gather in the gardenlike setting to feast on the made-to-order pork-filled crêpes.

MINH ĐỨC 100 Tôn Thất Tùng, District

1 (84/8-3839-2240). Here, home-style Vietnamese fare—pickled green papaya, sweet-and-sour fish soup, and more—is served in a white-tiled cafeteria-style setting. The servers speak limited English, but ordering is as simple as pointing to the dishes displayed in glass cases near the entrance.

PHỞ HOÀ 260C Pasteur, District 3 (84/8-3829-7943). Inexpensive. Founded in the 1950s, this phở shop—specializing in the fragrant meat and rice noodle soup called phở—is one of the oldest and best of its kind in Saigon.

QUÁN ĂN NGON 138 Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa, District 1 (84-8-3825-7179). Inexpensive. This establishment near the Reunification Palace (see below) is a great place to get acquainted with regional Vietnamese cooking, including rice noodles with grilled pork and rice paper rolls filled with pork skin and toasted rice. Most visitors order their food to go, but table service is also available in a tranquil courtyard.

WHAT TO DO

BÌNH TÂY CHỢ LỚN MARKET Đường Tháp Mười, District 6. A maze of vendors' stalls at this open-air wholesale market in Saigon's Chinese district sells fresh and dried foods and provides a fine introduction to the raw materials of Vietnamese cooking. Here you can purchase ingredients that are hard to find in the U.S., including a wealth of tropical fruits.

REUNIFICATION PALACE 135 Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa, District 1 (84/8-3829-4117). This sprawling building, erected in 1966 to house the office of the president of what was then the Republic of South Vietnam, was the site of the official handover of power after the fall of Saigon, in April 1975. Parts of the complex are now open to the public as a museum and offer a fascinating window onto the last quarter century of Vietnamese history.

SAIGON



CÁ KHO

(Catfish Simmered in Caramel Sauce)

SERVES 4

White rice and stir-fried Asian greens, such as bok choy, are good accompaniments for this classic sweet and savory Vietnamese fish dish.

- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp. light brown sugar
- 3 tbsp. fish sauce (see page 100)
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 1"-thick catfish or salmon steaks (about 8 oz. each)
- 1 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 cup strained fresh or canned unsweetened young coconut juice (not milk)
- 5 Thai chiles, stemmed and halved crosswise
- 4 scallions, cut into 1" lengths
- 2 cups steamed white rice

1 Combine granulated sugar and 1/4 cup water in a 1-qt. saucepan over medium-low heat and cook, without stirring, until sugar dissolves and sauce becomes dark brown, about 25 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let cool slightly. Vigorously stir in brown sugar, fish sauce, salt, pepper, and garlic to make a marinade. Put the fish into a shallow baking dish and pour marinade over the steaks, flipping to coat; set aside to let marinate for 15 minutes.

2 Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fish and marinade and cook, flipping fish once, until marinade thickens, about 5 minutes. Add coconut juice and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, flipping the fish once and

basting with the cooking liquid, until the liquid thickens slightly and the fish is cooked through, about 15 minutes. Using a spatula, transfer fish to 4 serving plates. Raise heat to medium-high, add chiles and scallions, and cook until scallions soften, 2-3 minutes. Spoon sauce over fish and serve with rice and stir-fried greens, such as bok choy.



BÁNH XÈO

(Sizzling Rice Crêpes)

MAKES 6 LARGE CRÊPES

When making these crunchy, savory crêpes, be sure to use rice flour milled from long-grain rice, as opposed to glutinous (sticky) rice flour. (For more information, see "A Shopper's Guide", page 90.) In Vietnam, these crêpes are usually served with nước chấm, a dipping sauce made with fish sauce and lime juice (see SAVEUR.COM/ISSUE120 for a recipe), and a garnish of fresh herbs.

FOR THE BATTER:

- 2 cups rice flour
- 1 1/2 tbsp. tapioca starch or cornstarch
- 1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/3 cup coconut milk
- 1 scallion, thinly sliced

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1/4 cup dried yellow split mung beans, soaked in water for 2 hours
- 1 cup plus 1 tbsp. canola oil
- 10 oz. peeled rock shrimp (about 40 shrimp) or peeled and chopped medium shrimp
- 8 oz. ground pork
- 1 small yellow onion, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 4 cups bean sprouts

FOR THE GARNISH:

- 1 large head butter lettuce
- 10 sprigs each cilantro, mint, perilla, Thai basil, and fish mint

1 Make the batter: In a large bowl, whisk together the rice flour, tapioca starch, and salt. Make a well in the center, pour in the coconut milk and 2 cups water, and whisk until the batter is smooth. Whisk in the scallions; set batter aside to let rest for 1 hour.

2 Make the filling: Drain the mung beans. Bring 1" water to a boil in a pot fitted with a steamer attachment. Add mung beans to the steamer, cover, and steam until just tender, about 10 minutes. Transfer mung beans to a plate and set aside to let cool.

3 Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 12" nonstick skillet over high heat. Add shrimp, pork, and onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until pork is golden brown and cooked through, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and set shrimp mixture aside.

4 Working in batches, heat 2 tbsp. oil in a 12" nonstick skillet over high heat. Using a liquid measuring cup, pour 1/2 cup batter into the skillet, swirling to cover the bottom. Cook until partially set, about 45 seconds. Sprinkle 2 tbsp. mung beans over crêpe; then add one-sixth of the shrimp mixture and 2/3 cup of the bean sprouts. Lower the heat to medium, cover, and cook until the bean sprouts have wilted slightly, about 3 minutes. Uncover and drizzle 1 1/2 tsp. oil around the rim of the skillet. Cook, uncovered, until the edge of crêpe crisps and pulls away from the rim of the skillet and turns golden brown, about 3 more minutes. Fold crêpe in half with a spatula and slide onto a platter. Wipe out skillet and repeat to make 6 crêpes in all.

5 To serve, pass the platter of crêpes with the garnishes and dipping sauce. Tear off a piece of the crêpe, wrap it with lettuce and any combination of the herbs, and dip in nước chấm, if you like.



GỎI NGÓ SEN

(Lotus Stem Salad)

SERVES 6

The jarred white lotus roots or stems for this crisp, tart-sweet salad can be found at many Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese markets. Be sure to buy the variety that contains no added sugar or vinegar. (See "A Shopper's Guide", page 90.)

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 1 1/2 tbsp. fish sauce
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 3 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 1-2 Thai chiles, stemmed and finely chopped

FOR THE SALAD:

- 1 15-oz. jar lotus stems or roots, drained and rinsed
- 1 6-oz. piece cooked pork loin, cut into 1 1/2" x 1/4" strips
- 1/3 lb. cooked medium shrimp (about 20 shrimp), peeled, tails on
- 2/3 cup pickled carrot and daikon (see facing page for a recipe)
- 10 jarred pickled shallots, rinsed and thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1/4 cup roughly chopped rau răm (Vietnamese coriander) or cilantro leaves
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped tender Chinese celery leaves or regular celery leaves (optional)
- 1/3 cup chopped roasted unsalted peanuts
- Kosher salt, to taste

1 Make the dressing: Combine fish sauce, sugar, lime juice, and chiles in a small bowl and stir until sugar is dissolved. Set dressing aside.

2 Make the salad: Halve lotus stems

SAIGON

crosswise and quarter them lengthwise, transfer to a large bowl, and cover with water; soak for 2 minutes. Drain lotus stems and transfer to a large bowl. Add pork, shrimp, pickled carrot and daikon, pickled shallots, rau răm or cilantro, celery leaves (if using), and peanuts. Toss salad with the reserved dressing and season with salt and more fish sauce and lime juice, if you like. Transfer salad to a platter, leaving excess dressing in the bowl.

**GIÒ HEO HẦM MĂNG**

(Pork Hocks Simmered with Bamboo Shoots)

SERVES 6

If you can't find fresh pork hocks, you may use pork shoulder, cut into 2" cubes, instead. This dish is traditionally prepared with dried and rehydrated bamboo shoots, but we found that canned ones are a worthy stand-in. (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for hard-to-find ingredients.)

- 2½ lbs. fresh pork hocks
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 small onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp. fish sauce
- 1 ¾" piece golden rock sugar
- 6 canned bamboo shoot tips, cut lengthwise into sixths
- 2 dried wood ear mushrooms, soaked in hot water, drained and cut into ½"-wide strips
- 4 large dried shiitake mushrooms, soaked in hot water, drained, stemmed, and quartered
- ½ lb. dried round bún rice noodles, boiled until tender, drained, and rinsed

12 scallions, white and pale green parts only

① Season pork with salt and transfer to plate. Heat oil in a 6-qt. dutch oven over high heat. Add the pork and cook, turning occasionally, until lightly browned, 5 minutes. Add the onions and cook, stirring frequently, until soft, about 6 minutes. Add the fish sauce and 10 cups water and bring to a boil, skimming any foam on the surface. Add sugar and bamboo tips, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, uncovered, until pork is tender, about 2 hours. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 10 minutes. Season the broth with more salt and fish sauce, if you like.

② Divide noodles between 6 bowls. Transfer pork to a plate; cut off and discard skin. Slice the meat off the bone, and divide between the bowls. Return broth to a boil; add scallions and cook for 30 seconds. Ladle broth over noodles and pork; serve.

**ĐỒ CHUA**

(Carrot and Daikon Pickle)

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

This crunchy pickle can stand alone as a snack or an appetizer, or you can add it to Asian dipping sauces, bánh mì (the spicy Vietnamese baguette pork sandwich), or salads like the lotus stem salad shown on facing page.

- ½ lb. carrots, peeled and cut into matchsticks
- 1½ lbs. small daikon, peeled and cut into matchsticks
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. plus ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup plus 2 tbsp. white vinegar

① In a bowl, combine the carrots, daikon, salt, and 1 tsp. sugar. Let sit until the vegetables have wilted slightly and liquid pools at the bottom of the bowl, about 30 minutes. Drain vegetables; rinse and pat dry with paper towels. Transfer vegetables to a medium bowl.

② Whisk together the remaining sugar, the vinegar, and ½ cup warm water and pour mixture over the vegetables. Stir to combine. Set mixture aside to let marinate for at least 1 hour or refrigerate, tightly covered, for up to 4 weeks.

**CHÈ CHUỐI**

(Banana, Coconut, and Tapioca Pearl Soup)

SERVES 4

This creamy, sweet dessert is a favorite Vietnamese street snack.

- ¼ cup small tapioca pearls (about ⅛" in diameter; see page 100)
- 1 lb. firm-ripe bananas, peeled and cut crosswise into ¾"-thick slices
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ¼ cup sugar
- ⅛ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 tbsp. unsalted roasted peanuts, for garnish (optional)

① Bring 2½ cups water to a boil over high heat in a 2-qt. saucepan. Stir in the tapioca pearls and cook, stirring occasionally, until the pearls are translucent and the liquid has thickened, about 12 minutes. To check tapioca pearls for doneness, look for a tiny white dot in the center of the pearl; if you don't see one, continue to cook.

② Add bananas, coconut milk, sugar, and salt and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer, stirring occasionally, until the bananas are just soft and the flavors have melded, about 2 minutes. Remove pan from the heat, stir in the vanilla, and let soup cool for 10 minutes. Ladle soup into small bowls and top with peanuts, if you like.

MUNG BEANS

Mung beans—used in the making of the bánh xèo, or sizzling rice crêpes, on the facing page—come from the plant *Vigna radiata*, which likely originated in India some 3,000 years ago. Unhulled, the small, round beans have an olive green skin; husked and split, they reveal a golden flesh possessed of a subtly sweet flavor and a surprisingly rich texture. In this country, we're the most familiar with the bean's crunchy white sprouts, but in Vietnam and other Asian countries, the beans themselves form the base of countless sweet and savory dishes. Prized for their versatility, the beans, also called green gram beans, are used in soups, porridges, and rice dishes; they can also play a role in desserts like jin doi, a doughnut-like Chinese pastry filled with sweetened mung bean paste, and lend their starchy character to the cellophane noodles used in many Asian soups. What's more, mung beans cook relatively quickly, in roughly half the time needed for legumes like yellow lentils. Look for the beans at Asian, Indian, and Middle Eastern markets, usually labeled "peeled split mung beans". (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for a source.) —Katherine Cancila



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KITCHEN

Discoveries and Techniques from Our Favorite Recipes in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman

Fresh Tastes

VIETNAMESE COOKS (see “Coming Home”, page 82) use a wide variety of herbs—referred to collectively as rau thơm (literally, fragrant vegetable)—sometimes adding them to dishes as they cook, sometimes serving them raw as a garnish; they also lend bright notes to your favorite mesclun mix. Spearmint **1**, which grows in abundance in Southeast Asia, sparks up salads, grilled foods, and noodle dishes with a sweet, aromatic flavor. Thai basil **2** lends its clovelike scent to the beef noodle soup called phở. Spear-shaped Vietnamese coriander **3**, which is often sold in Asian markets in the U.S. under its Vietnamese name, rau răm, contributes a peppery, cilantro-esque flavor to soups and salads. Rice paddy herb **4**, so called because it grows in flooded rice fields, imparts citrus and cumin notes to southern Vietnamese curries. The spade-shaped leaves of fish mint **5**, also called bishop’s weed, give a tangy, pungent edge to boldly flavored foods like grilled beef. A member of the shiso family, red perilla **6** has purplish leaves that taste of cinnamon, mint, and lemon. Cutting celery **7**, often called Chinese celery, looks like Italian flat-leaf parsley and is prized for its concentrated celery flavor. (See *THE PANTRY*, page 100, for sources.) —Andrea Nguyen

KITCHEN

Tough Love

Choosing meat for a stew, like the lamb stew on page 56, couldn't be easier; just stick to cuts that come from the shoulder. The most exercised parts of the animal—the shoulder, neck, and legs—have the thickest muscle fibers and the most connective tissue holding the muscle, fat, and bone together. Cuts that



come from these parts are tougher than those from the less exercised parts on the back, which are used for sautéing or grilling. In the making of a stew, however, tough is good. For one thing, well-exercised meat is more flavorful. Also, connective tissue contains a lot of collagen, which, when simmered in liquid, imparts a luscious texture to foods. Nowhere on the animal—be it a cow, a pig, or a sheep—is there more connective tissue than in the shoulder (called the chuck in beef and lamb); it also contains plenty of fat. The key is slow and moist cooking, so that the connective tissue has time to soften. Shoulder can be bought as roasts, as steaks, and in chunks, which butchers often label, aptly, stew meat. —Todd Coleman

Precious Powder

WE LOVE MILK shakes of all sorts (see “Great Shakes”, page 17), but we're especially ardent devotees of the malted version. Malted gets their toasty, rich flavor from malted milk powder, a combination of malted barley, wheat flour, and whole milk, mixed together and evaporated to a fine dust. There are several brands to choose from, including Carnation and Kitchen Krafts, but we've always

preferred Horlicks malted milk powder, which has a wonderfully rounded, mildly sweet taste. The founders of the company that makes it, James and William Horlick, also happened to be the inventors of the ingredient itself. They patented their invention in 1883 in Racine, Wisconsin, where their company was based. In 1890, James took the company to the brothers' native England. Over there, Horlicks powder mixed with hot milk is a popular bedtime



treat. Stateside, the malted milk shake has mutated into dozens of delicious forms, some of which are described in the informative book *Soda Fountain Luncheonette Drinks and Recipes* (J. O. Dahl, 1940) by L. P. De Gouy. A standout from the book is the royal (pictured). A blend of vanilla ice cream, simple syrup, ginger ale, and, of course, a spoonful of malted milk powder, it is a majestic malted indeed (see SAVEUR.COM for a recipe). —Katherine Cancila



An Iceberg Tip

Like many vegetables, iceberg lettuce (see “The Ice Queen”, page 76) begins to lose its moisture—and with it the crispness that is its cardinal appeal—the moment it is pulled from the ground. Our testing of a number of recipes calling for iceberg lettuce prompted us to wonder whether there was a way to turn back the clock and restore moisture that the lettuce may have lost during shipping or while sitting in the fridge. It seems there's a tried-and-true method for doing just that: keeping the leaves immersed in a bowl of

ice water for ten minutes or so. According to the food scientist Harold McGee, submerging the lettuce causes its cells to become engorged and rigid; the low temperature stiffens the cell walls and intensifies the snap that occurs when you bite into the leaf. The immersion method worked so well that we tried it with other raw vegetables, too, including the chiles and cucumbers in the iceberg salad with blue cheese vinaigrette shown on page 81. The result was a salad as crisp and fresh as springtime itself. —Ben Mims

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KITCHEN



The Fine Slice

TO PROCESS CARROTS into the thin sticks called julienne—a technique essential for making the carrot and daikon pickle on page 93 and the iceberg slaw on page 81—requires patient, careful slicing. Most professional cooks chop their carrots into two-inch-long segments, square off and discard the edges, and cut the segments into thin planks, which they then stack up and slice into slivers. It's a perfectly serviceable way of going about it, but it produces a lot of wasted carrot. We prefer the following technique, which we learned from Shirley Cheng, a professor of Asian cooking at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Here's how to do it. —T.C.

1 Trim and peel a carrot. Using a large, sharp knife (a cleaver also works well), slice the carrot on a deep diagonal into thin, broad slices, keeping the overlapping slices nestled close together as you work. Cutting on the diagonal allows you to use almost the whole carrot; slices from the tapered end will be about the same length as those from the thicker end.

2 Spread the carrot slices out like a deck of cards, so that one slice overlaps most of another.

3 Working from one end of the pile to the other, cut the carrot slices into thin slivers, holding the carrots down firmly with your free hand as you go.



Sun and Spice

Cooks all over the world rely on chile powders, from paprika to cayenne, for heat, but ground Aleppo pepper, featured in many of the Turkish dishes in "Soul of a City" (page 58), adds much more. Named for a city in Syria, Aleppo chiles, a variety of *Capsicum annum*, are seeded, sun-dried, and crushed. The resulting russet-colored shards convey hints of tobacco and a lemony piquancy that meld brilliantly with other flavors, and their coarseness can add an unexpected textural dimension to salads, kebabs, and sautéed vegetables. (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for a source.) —K.C.

Perfectly Paired

While sampling Basilicata's rustic, sun-baked cuisine (see "In Deepest Italy", page 42), we were struck by how naturally the rich, red local wines made from the ancient aglianico grape—which is cultivated in the volcanic soil of the hilly region of Vulture—complement the local fare. Below, some choice bottles. —Dana Bowen

Cantine del Notaio Il Sigillo 2004 (\$60)

Big and jammy, with hints of wet leaves and earth.

Cantine Sasso 2006 (\$15)

Uncharacteristically light and fruity; perfect with pasta in tomato and pepper sauces.

Casa Maschito La Bottiaia 2003 (\$29)

Red fruit with a hint of dried fennel.

Caselle D'Angelo Riserva 2003 (\$36)

Deep, dried fruit with a whiff of smoke.

Elena Fucci Titolo 2006 (\$45)

Sweet berries with dark chocolate.

Re Manfredi 2004 (\$30)

Supple fruit layered with leather and spice

(right). A classic aglianico.



KITCHEN

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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered food products and destinations too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY HUNTER LEWIS

Fare

In Mexico City, sip pulque at **La Hermosa Hortensia** (plaza Garibaldi 4). To sample Connecticut eats, visit **Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana** (157 Wooster Street, New Haven; 203/865-5762), **Prospect Dairy Bar** (29 Waterbury Road, Prospect; 203/758-5651), the **Dressing Room** (27 Powers Court, Westport; 203/226-1114), **Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale** (86 Boston Post Road, Westport; 860/669-0767), **Ted's Restaurant** (1046 Broad Street, Meriden; 203/237-6660), **Rawley's** (1886 Post Road, Fairfield; 203/259-9023), **Marcus Dairy Bar** (5 Sugar Hollow Road, Danbury; 203/748-9427), and **Nardelli's Grinder Shoppe** (540 Plank Road, Waterbury; 203/754-5600). You can order farmstead cheeses from **Cato Corner Farm** (860/537-3884) and **Beaver Brook Farm** (860/434-2843). In London, try **Brick Lane Beigel Bake** (159 Brick Lane, Spitalfields; 020/7729-0616) and **Britain's First & Best Beigel Shop** (155 Brick Lane, Spitalfields; 020/7729-0826). Order the **Bastianich 2005 Tocai Plus** (\$69 for a 750-ml bottle) from New York Vintners (212/812-3999).

Cellar

The **Clontarf Classic Blend** (ask for the black label) and **Knappogue Castle 1995 Single Malt Whiskey** can be purchased at Park Avenue Liquor (212/685-2442); the **Connemara Cask Strength Peated Single Malt** is available at Wally's Wine (310/475-0606); and the **Jameson 18 Year Old Limited Reserve, Midleton Very Rare 2008 Vintage, Redbreast 12 Year Old Pure Pot Still Whiskey**, and **Old Bushmills 10 Year Old Single Malt Whiskey**

are for sale at Binny's (847/581-3186).

Basilicata

Di Palo Fine Foods carries the **peperoni di Senise** (\$20 for a 1-pound string or \$4.99 for a 20-gram bag), **strascinati pasta** (\$3.99 for a 500-gram bag), **crema di pistachio** (\$5.99 for a 90-gram jar), **caciocavallo Podolico** (\$14.99 per pound), **canestrato** (\$15.99 per pound), **roasted peppers**, **anchovy-stuffed peppers**, and **eggplant involtini** (\$6.99 for a 180-gram jar; 212/226-1033; www.dipaloselects.com). A variety of **fagioli di Sarconi** (\$8.75 for a 250-gram bag) can be found at Buon Italia (212/633-9090; www.buonitalia.com); and for the **luganeghe sausages** (\$4.49 per pound; ask for "sweet Italian sausage without fennel"), contact Esposito's (888/988-3776; www.espositosausage.com). To make the pasta, use **peperoni di Senise** (see above). To make the fava beans with dandelion greens, use **dried shelled split fava beans** (\$9.99 for a 2-pound bag), available at Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; www.kalustyans.com).

Istanbul

Kalustyan's (see above) carries **pomegranate molasses** (P) (\$10.99 for a 14-ounce bottle), **dried ground aleppo pepper** (\$5.99 for a 2.5-ounce jar), and **ground sumac** (P) (\$3.99 for a 2-ounce pack; ask for "sumac powder") for making the tomato salad; **flat metal skewers** (\$10.99 for a ¼-inch-wide stainless-steel skewer) for the urfa kebab; and **frozen shredded phyllo dough** (P) (\$15.99 for a 22-ounce box) for the shredded wheat and cheese pastry.

Iceberg Lettuce

For the Chinese minced chicken wraps, use **sweet Asian chile sauce** (\$6.99 for a 12-ounce bottle; ask for "Thai sweet chili sauce"), available at Kalustyan's (see above). Order **baby iceberg lettuce** (\$3.99 for 3 heads) from Frieda's (714/826-6100; www.friedas.com).

Saigon

For the sizzling rice crêpes, use **rice flour** (P) (\$0.89 for a 1-pound bag; ask for "Er-

awan brand"); **tapioca starch** (\$1.79 for a 1-pound box), available at AsianWok (800/300-6346; www.asianwok.com); and **dried yellow split mung beans** (P) (\$3.50 for a 1-pound bag), available at Kalyx (315/245-3000; www.kalyx.com). The **lotus root in brine** (P) (\$3.50 for a 16-ounce jar; ask for "lotus rootlets") for the lotus stem salad is available at AsiaMex (636/272-0604; www.asiamex.com), and **pickled shallots** (\$8.99 for a 475-gram jar) are to be had at Kalustyan's (see above). To make the simmered pork hocks, use Chinese **golden rock sugar** (P) (\$3.99 for a 16-ounce package) from Grocery Thai (818/469-9407; www.grocerythai.com); **fish sauce** (P) (\$2.45 for a 24-ounce bottle) and **dried shiitake mushrooms** (\$5.50 for a 1-ounce bag), available at AsiaMex (see above); **bún rice noodles** (\$2.69 for a 10.58-ounce package; ask for "rice stick noodles"), available at SpiceZon (www.spicezon.com); **dried wood ear mushrooms** (P) (\$7.99 for a 1-ounce bag); available at Kalustyan's (see above); and **bamboo shoot tips in water** (P) (\$3.85 for a 19-ounce can), available at LatinMerchant (206/223-9374; www.latinmerchant.com). To make the banana, coconut, and tapioca pearl soup, use **small tapioca pearls** (P) (\$0.89 for a 1-pound bag), available at AsianWok (see above).

Kitchen

Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com) supplies a range of **Vietnamese herbs** (P) (prices vary according to seasonality); you may also grow your own herbs from seed, sold by Kitazawa Seed Co. (510/595-1188 www.kitazawaseed.com). **Horlicks** (P) (\$11.95 for a 500-gram jar) is available at Tea & Sympathy (212/989-9735).

Correction

The Pastry War in Mexico, mentioned on page 19 of our March 2009 issue, occurred in 1838–1839.

Items marked with P also appear, with photographs, in our Visual Pantry at www.saveur.com/visualpantry120.

The paper used for this magazine comes from certified forests that are managed in a sustainable way to meet the social, economic, and environmental needs of present and future generations.



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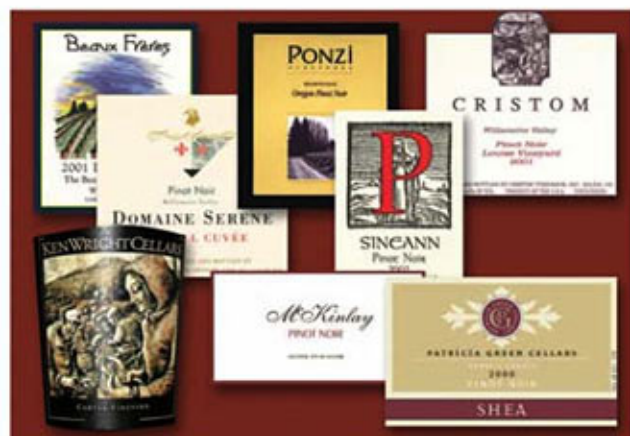
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PLACE Bac Ha, Vietnam

A Hmong woman lunches at a Sunday market in a village near the Chinese border.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN RICHTER



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